

REVIEWS



LEAVING THE LOOM

Michele Le Doeuff, *Hipparchia's Choice*, trans. Trista Selous, Oxford, Blackwell, 1991. xiii + 364pp., £45 hb, £14.95 pb, 0 631 17639 X hb, 0 631 17641 pb.

The title of Michele Le Doeuff's *Hipparchia's Choice*, the English translation of her *L'Etude et le rouet* published in 1989, refers to the Greek savante who said 'I have used for the getting of knowledge all the time which, because of my sex, I was supposed to waste at the loom.' Le Doeuff examines this decision under all its aspects including what is involved in not making it. The book is a study of obstacles to the getting of knowledge, especially philosophical knowledge, which women find in their way, not the least of which is ambivalence about its value. If philosophy consists in rationalized illusion, why demand access to it in the name of equal opportunity? And if the history of philosophy shows not just that the great male philosophers thought and said reprehensible things about women, but that philosophy conceives itself as a form of reflection superior to any cognition practised by women, animals or savages, then a woman who wants to be a philosopher must be either confused or treacherous. When philosophy not only projects you as what it is not and tirelessly explains you – your anomalous and intriguing location between nature and reason, between instinct and self-reflection – why should you want to give any assistance to the enterprise?

Although Le Doeuff's official answer to this question is that we do not need to settle the value of a subject before deciding that the selection mechanisms and prejudicial definitions sustaining it need to be undone, the book is a defence of philosophy which proceeds by first granting everything that can be said against it. It is addressed to a variety of readers – those who draw the wrong conclusion from the fact that philosophy has always posed a problem of self-justification for itself; those who think that philosophy is disconnected from the realities of experience and powerless to make anything happen; those who have thought, by contrast, that philosophy is an instrument of domination and works through hidden patterns of intimidation. And it is meant finally for women and men who, although they find it difficult to point to specific acts of injustice which cannot be explained away in particularist fashion, know that all is not right when it comes to women and their political and intellectual advancement. But how in that case can philosophy as a discursive mode reach through to 'silent social realities ... that are so stable that they do not need words to legitimate them'? Philosophy normally proceeds in its critical or clarifying role by conjuring a partner in the dialectic, one willing to enunciate certain theses as plausible and to defend them to their limits, and Le Doeuff conjures up the anti-female

spirit in a number of its incarnations: as the philosopher, as the State, as teacher, parent, doctor, pharmacist, entrepreneur and editor.

Hipparchia's Choice consists of four somewhat free-form essays called 'Notebooks', which move briskly from theme to theme, incorporating autobiography and personal reflection, analysis of philosophical and biographical documents, statistical information, and ethnology, jokes and fables. The first and last Notebooks are broad in scope; the middle two are organised as an analysis of Sartre and de Beauvoir who are considered separately and as a pair, as philosophers and as private people. Their case is thoroughly plumbed for ironies: the model friendship which inspired several generations of young women reveals its seamy side, its oppressions and contradictions.

Sartre's letters reveal him as a posturing, vain, deceitful person, whose theory of sexual independence was egoistic advantage disguised as iconoclasm. One might argue that this is irrelevant to the question of the value of his philosophy; Le Doeuff shows otherwise. Sartre's existentialism is conceived throughout in terms of conquest, subordination and frustration in a way which intentionally obviates the distinction between the personal and the political. Somehow women in *Being and Nothingness* fail to have any projects; as Le Doeuff points out, they are invisible except when they gain a momentary reality as problematic objects of male desire. There is the frigid woman who is supposed to give 'objective signs' of pleasure and who is supposed to deceive herself; and there is the woman in bad faith who leaves her hand lying limply in that of the man who has seized it across a restaurant table. The author exposes these examples as inadequate, on the grounds that (a) there does not seem to be any such phenomenon as bad-faith frigidity such as Sartre claims to be describing; and (b) his formulation of both cases is inconsistent with his own official doctrines. What exactly is an objective sign of pleasure when it is we who, according to existentialism, make everything mean what it means? Why does it not occur to Sartre to ask what meaning the woman at the restaurant table is attempting to negotiate? Le Doeuff draws several morals here. First, though ostensibly a metaphysical theory of existence and agency, existentialism failed to generalise its point of view much beyond healthy, young, male philosophers; second, its inability to handle the analysis of simple social situations casts doubt on its more elaborate pretensions; and third, Sartre's ability to sacrifice adequacy and consistency in order to gain psycho-philosophical reassurance in the face of female lack of enthusiasm raises broader questions about the philosophical enterprise itself. This intrusion of the imaginary into philosophical rationalism was the

subject of Le Doeuff's earlier book, *The Philosophical Imaginary* (reviewed in *Radical Philosophy* 55, Summer 1990). In the present work she finds Sartrean phenomenology embarrassingly laden with psychological projection: at the end of *Being and Nothingness* females are further dehumanized in the passages whose key words need 'to be quoted with tweezers' (Albert Levy). Here a mythological For-Itself must constantly re-attempt to escape slimy annihilation in the dark hole of the In-Itself. The author's point here is not simply that Sartre was a sexist philosopher or that these passages betray not clear and rigorous analysis but ambitions and anxieties of the most banal sort, but that nobody – not his editors, the reviewers of the books, not his first readers, male or female, ever thought of challenging the claim of *Being and Nothingness* to be good philosophy on this basis. It is as though, Le Doeuff says, philosophy issued an implicit invitation: say whatever you like about women; everyone will be keenly interested and no one will correct you on the grounds of accuracy or even good taste. Not only do men look at women – in the street, on the beach – in whatever way they like, confident of their judgement and their right to it; they also believe – like colonists who know the natives better than they themselves – that what they write about them is right.

And what did Beauvoir make of all this? After a rigorous argument about the principles of ethics with Sartre in their student days, in which she felt she had received a thorough trouncing, she resolved, she tells us, to leave philosophy to him. Beauvoir adopted some of the key distinctions of existentialism – for example she used the Sartrean contrast between immanence and transcendence to set housework and motherhood against intellectual and literary accomplishment. What is distressing is that she responded to the deprivations of her life with Sartre – evidence of which one reads between the lines of their correspondence – as though she had him and his metaphysics to thank that she was not a housewife. And the real tragedy of the situation is that in a sense she did. Certainly she benefited from the association and from a scheme to explain her life; had she been Sartre's or any one else's wife this would not have happened. All the same, she had to settle for less than what she wanted as Sartre did not, and she fell into the role of a female disciple, playing the Heloise to Sartre's Abelard, an act of abnegation, Le Doeuff argues, repeated by all women philosophers who sign on as Lacanian feminists, Foucauldian feminists, etc. But this self-subsumption was not complete: Beauvoir both recognised and denied that she had her own philosophy, one which abandoned Sartrean subjectivity and phenomenology for the study of intersubjectivity and institutions; she recognised and pondered the determinative conditions which Sartre was always trying to sweep away with his rhetoric. And yet she resisted knowing what she knew. It was as though all the old strictures against speaking up in the confidence that your assessment of the situation is as valid as anybody else's, were still in place, as indeed they were.

Beauvoir's courage and her hesitations tell us as much as Sartre's fantasising about what this hostility between women and philosophy comes to. Women, Le Doeuff notes, 'basically stop halfway on the path to becoming philosophers: something in the philosophical enterprise deters them and blocks their identification, although this was sufficiently strong to make them begin their initiation into the work.' There is a vicious circle here. Women are less likely to enter the field, more prone to vacillate in their commitment to it and to discuss their uncertainties with their male supervisors. They drift into marginal subjects; they complain when faced with logic, rigour, and abstractness; in general, these new players do not seem to be playing the game correctly and wholeheartedly in the way the old players feel they have a right to expect. These little refusals in combination with a certain persistence bring out in turn the spontaneous sexism of



those who have power over them. Teachers, journal editors, grant-giving panelists, employers, conference organisers, examiners and referees who are still for the most part male may weed them out as unserious, as interested in the wrong subjects, or approaching them in the wrong way, or simply fail to give them any positive encouragement. These exclusions contribute further to women's unease with the subject and so it goes.

How do you interrupt this cycle? The author calls for restraint and positive action on the part of both men and women. Male philosophers need to learn to distinguish the conditioned female tendency to self-sacrifice and self-abnegation from innate intellectual and social inferiority. They need to stop theorising women from the outside (and anyone who doubts that this still goes on need only read Emmanuel Levinas). Women in turn need to resist the blandishments of hyperphilosophism, the sort of undermining Le Doeuff finds exemplified in Janet Radcliffe Richards's *The Sceptical Feminist*, and of the 'feminism of difference' which advocates a return to jam-, jelly- and quilt-making, or which loses itself in ecstatic asyntactical reverie (Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigaray), or in some other way decides what men are like and to be the opposite. Women, she thinks, must lay aside their grievance against the field, well-justified though it is, and, in advance of anyone making it easy for them to do this, they should act so as to become successors of the old philosophers, which they will do by unravelling and reweaving the old garment, as philosophers have always done anyway. The philosophical canon is riddled with absurdities and cruelties; but still there is light and warmth to be had. For Le Doeuff, only philosophical analysis can unmask the delusions it has generated; and it supplies the perspective which lets us see second nature as artifice. Despite its historically tight control over who was allowed to have a say and its complicity with corrupted procedures for authentication in the profession, the conception of philosophy as ideal dialogue is not to be scorned until our cynicism becomes unregenerate. The big mistake is to give it up as sour grapes.

The last Notebook addresses questions of political and legislative reform. There are valuable discussions here of the moral and anthropological confusion in the debate over the circumcision of African female infants, which the author finds uncon-

scionable, or pornography, advertising, and the availability of contraceptives. Le Doeuff argues for a number of changes in the legal structure. First, the law relating to parents and children needs to be revised, with abolition of patrilineality so that parental investment in daughters who may carry on the family name will be as much as in sons. Second, there should be full provision for extramarital children, so that the threat of female infidelity does not ensure women's confinement in marriage. Third, the relation between the state, as the major employer in modern industrial democracies, and the female population needs to be scrutinised. So does public expenditure – why, she asks earlier in the book, do the public finances support expenditures which are of purely symbolic significance such as military parades and air-shows which gratify almost exclusively men, when women's material needs – such as sponsored childcare – are ignored? Selection panels and all decision-making bodies should be 50% (elected bodies not less than 35%) of one sex. This will automatically, she argues, bring about a rapid redistribution of appointments, honours, and glories. A point in favour of this proposal is that it is not open to the usual objections against quotas. Such boards and panels, which are charged only with reviewing the evidence fairly, are never staffed according to objective criteria in the first place but depend on networks of acquaintances, so that there is no offence to justice in constituting them representatively. Yet one may well demand that the deliberations of these bodies be

conducted according to the usual criteria of the meritocracy.

'I was born just about everywhere,' the author writes, 'under the now shattered sky of the Greeks, in a Brittany farmer's clogs, in an Elizabethan theatre, in my grandmother's famines and destitutions, and in the secular, compulsory and free schooling that the state was so good as to make available to me, but also in the rebellions that were mine alone, in the slaps that preceded or followed them, in Simone de Beauvoir's lucid distress, and in Descartes's stove.' It is difficult in a review of a book whose literary gracefulness is not after all its main point to do justice to its style and wit, which come through admirably in the translation by Trista Selous. This is not one of those books that ask to be read just because they are by women, about women, for women, etc. Its perspective is cosmopolitan and universal; from the first page we realise that this author has seen more, read more, and thought more than most of us ever will in this subject. By way of criticism it can be said that Le Doeuff's vision of ideal family life will seem excessively St. Simonian to some, and that the Fourth Notebook – which was originally a separate essay, and is not well integrated – has its longueurs. The proofreading is not good throughout, and in the Fourth Notebook it is especially bad, with French and English words, proper names, etc. misprinted. These are minor criticisms of a thoroughly rewarding book.

Catherine Wilson

ECOPOETICS

Jonathan Bate, *Romantic Ecology: Wordsworth and the Environmental Tradition*, London, Routledge, 1991. 131pp., £30 hb, £8.99 pb, 0 415 06115 6 hb, 0 415 06116 4 pb.

In *Romantic Ecology*, Jonathan Bate proposes a relatively modest positive goal. It 'seems valuable', he argues, 'to make claims for the historical continuity of a tradition of environmental consciousness; Wordsworth by no means initiated that tradition, but he has been a vital influence upon it.' Bate sets out to elucidate the 'environmental consciousness' expressed in Wordsworth's poetry, to trace subsequent literary developments of its themes in the work of Ruskin, Morris, Edward Thomas and others, and to urge its pertinence today. The book's polemical intention, however, is negative as well as positive, for Bate's project involves a contestation of readings of Romanticism current in 'new historicist' cultural studies, and he claims for the literary text a founding ideological force which deconstructive historicisations call in question. In particular, the 'crude old model of left and right' which underlies much critical work published in the 1980s is rejected not only as reductive, but as meaningless for the 1990s. The collapse of communism, Bate insists, opens the way to a new politics of the environment in which Wordsworthian celebration of Nature is restored to a central position.

Bate thus accepts the challenge of producing an acceptable 'political Wordsworth' for contemporary readers. His emphasis falls (in terms of the Johnsonian distinction quoted in the Introduction) on the 'use' we can make of the poems, rather than the 'pleasure' they can afford us. Much ground – too much, it may be – is thereby ceded at the outset to those critics with whom he proceeds to take issue.

Wordsworth's directly political writing, and especially his reflections (in *The Prelude*) on the French Revolution and its aftermath, is mainly concerned with liberty, tyranny and democracy, and also – in passages which E. P. Thompson singled out for their percipience (in *The Poverty of Theory*) – with the psychol-

ogy of political enthusiasm and despondency. We can hardly find in his work any overt 'politics of the environment': the phrase, and the concept, cannot be applied without anachronism to the earlier nineteenth century. It is true, of course, that the Romantic discourse of Nature expresses values which came to inform later, more overtly political writing. Bate's first two chapters demonstrate the working of this view of Nature in Wordsworth, arguing that this 'version of the pastoral' complements rather than vitiates the poet's radical democratic politics of the early 1800s. But for eco-politics today – even if we could define this as Bate does and regard it as displacing, rather than complicating, the politics of class – Romantic celebration, however eloquent, is hardly sufficient. Our problem is not to convince ourselves and each other that Nature is to be venerated, but to find economic and political means of making good our professed reverence, in a social and technological setting vastly changed since the days of Wordsworth or even Ruskin. Bate's exposition of the Wordsworthian tradition yields very little to help us with this daunting task.

All the weight falls, then, on Wordsworth and his successors as celebrants of Nature, and of its morally, aesthetically and spiritually regenerative powers. But what is convincing, valuable and memorable as personal meditation and autobiographical record does not necessarily bear translation into the directly political terms Bate wishes to employ. Here, indeed, Romantic traditions may well be regarded as not just inadequate, but actively unhelpful. Recent critics of Wordsworth tend to express such a view (or to imply it, for few of them draw out the implications for the 1990s of their critical deconstructions) in detailed analysis of the Wordsworthian construction of landscape and rurality. Wordsworth's account of Lakeland society is revealed as incomplete and idealised. He is shown, often, to make the people in his poems into adjuncts, correlates or stimuli to his own imaginative activity (hence Keats's phrase: 'the wordsworthian or egotistical sublime'). We can see him screening out evidences of modernity which might discompose his

chosen aesthetic and spiritual conventions: neither the coal-wharves near Tintern nor the beggars who crowded the Abbey appear in the famous poem. His favoured images of community, it is argued, support not just the sturdy republican virtues of the early poetry, but the Burkean conservatism and British patriotism of later work. A charge not discussed by Bate, but pressed by John Barrell (in *Poetry, Language and Politics*, 1988), is that the poetic subjectivity which offers itself as universal remains, on interrogation, determinately masculine and bourgeois.

Such criticism is sometimes voiced in offensively knowing and condescending tones – Wordsworth being found guilty of discursive lapses which (on the showing of his critics themselves) were more or less inevitable for anyone writing at the time. The implication that he should have written differently is often quite unhistorical, in other words. But the points made remain telling as regards the limits, for any modern political purpose, of Wordsworth's 'environmental consciousness'. Bate's general response is to sidestep them by turning to the poet's evocation of a primary realm of Nature, beyond economic and cultural determination, with the suggestion that ecological politics now recuperates the value of such evocation. The points made by recent critics, however, challenge, precisely, the possibility of constructing 'Nature' in extra-social terms.

As an instance, we can take the discussion of the 'Poems on the Naming of Places' first printed in the second edition of *Lyrical Ballads*. In these short and unassuming poems, an association between place and remembered feeling or incident is effectively established and pleasurably communicated. One might be content to leave it at that. But Bate wants these texts politicised: they are part, he says, of 'an ecological tradition of English place-poetry', and their 'sacramental' dimension is offered as exemplary (the discussion broadens, later, to take in work by Hardy and Edward Thomas). Once such a political reading begins, it takes us further than Bate seems to recognise. He acknowledges that name-giving (metaphorical possession) is akin to as well as distinct from actual land ownership, and he pays some attention to discussion of this point by the critic David Simpson, but he does not fully acknowledge the meaning of Wordsworth's possession. The 'ecolect' of the Wordsworth circle is culturally appropriative, surely, when the poet is pictured explaining to a group of shepherds that the 'wild place' where they stand is henceforth to be called 'Emma's dell'. Both the place and the woman – actually Dorothy

Wordsworth, sometimes called 'Emma' in her brother's poems – are being spoken for. The writer's playful 'naming' leads directly, as he was aware it would, into the authorship of a printed book with a metropolitan audience, along paths certainly closed to the shepherds, who may after all have had their own names and tales. Wordsworth, like Hardy and like Seamus Heaney (also briefly discussed in *Romantic Ecology*), is caught in a complex politics of representation and double identification, between local community and wider audience. Whereas the two later writers are sharply aware of these matters and of how the act of writing inevitably implicates them in that politics, Wordsworth, in this group of poems, shows no sense of the tensions which his position might entail (even if the *Lyrical Ballads* as a whole did challenge some readerly expectations of the pastoral).

If 'environmental tradition' is offered as a political resource today, such matters become pertinent. Cultural appropriations of landscape can inflect, unhelpfully, the difficult quest for a democratic ecological language. Alongside the hope that the poet might speak to and for everyone, we find in Wordsworth an insistent valorisation of a more educated and special sensibility. The poet is not just 'a man speaking to men', and such a formulation is not problematic only for the gender of its 'universal subject', for the same text (the 'Preface' to *Lyrical Ballads*) also says much about what makes the poet different. We can agree that poets are different, in their expressive talents, while sensing that a 'Nature' constructed as the guardian and touchstone of aesthetic distinction makes a problematic reference point for ecological and environmental politics. In Wordsworth's letters on the projected Kendal to Windermere railway (1844), we find an early expression of the anxieties engendered when mass tourism threatens to affect pleasures which Nature has hitherto offered to choicer spirits. If we share those anxieties, we must surely do so in an awkward and self-doubting spirit by which Wordsworth was evidently untroubled. Bate suggests that Wordsworth's argument here is acceptable to a modern environmentalist sensibility, but he takes good care not to quote the sentences in which the poet urges that 'artisans and labourers, and the humbler classes of shopkeepers' should 'on the Sunday, after having attended divine worship ... make little excursions with their wives and children among neighbouring fields', rather than catching the train to the Lakes.

Martin Ryle

EXCOMMUNICATIONS

Axel Honneth, *The Critique of Power: Reflective Stages in a Critical Social Theory*, Cambridge, Massachusetts, MIT Press, 1991. 340pp., £24.75 hb, 0 262 08202 0.

Thomas McCarthy, *Ideals and Illusions: On Reconstruction and Deconstruction in Contemporary Critical Theory*, Cambridge, Massachusetts, MIT Press, 1991. 254pp., £19.95 hb, 0 262 13268 0.

Jane Braaten, *Habermas's Critical Theory of Society*, State University of New York Press, 1991. 191pp., \$14.95 pb, \$44.50 hb, 0 7914 0760 8.

It is now common for advocates of contemporary critical theory to insist on the conceptual superiority of Jürgen Habermas's work to that of the early Frankfurt School. From the communication-theoretic standpoint, the defects of the philosophy of history outlined by Horkheimer and Adorno are clear. The thesis of social domination sketched in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* is both politically one-sided and theoretically unconvincing. It leads to a

totalised model of the domination of nature, of others, and of ourselves. The negativism of critical theory thus represents that point at which the reflective task of a search for social critique succumbs. By contrast, so it is argued, Habermas's concept of communicative action offers a new framework for analysing structures of social conflict, a framework which suggestively underscores the human capacities that are needed to reverse social domination in the interests of human freedom.

There is, undeniably, some truth in this version of the history of German critical theory. Recent critiques of the philosophy of the subject show the inadequacies of the early Frankfurt School's rather solitary, monadic conception of selfhood. For this view relied on the pre-theoretic assumption that a devastating repression of inner nature is the price paid for individuation. However, the transition from the philosophy of consciousness to intersubjectivity – as formulated by Habermas and others – shows that subjectivity is not established in one fell swoop through some uniform, repressive introjection of the law; it is, as Habermas

argues, formed through structures of communication which involve both autonomy and heteronomy.

Having sorted out these conceptual difficulties, the reconstruction of critical theory is today generally thought secure. Like the great bulk of social-theoretical traditions, critical theory is not partial to reviewing what it has 'disproven'. (This task has generally been left to 'outside' commentators – many of whom argue that, although the shift to intersubjectivity may be a conceptual advance, contemporary critical theory has lost sight of the inner repression and psychic fragmentation of the subject, a fundamental focus of the early Frankfurt School.) Instead, Habermas and his disciples have been more concerned to 'test' their concept of communicative action by recourse to theories of moral learning processes and empirical studies of intersubjective agreement. This being so, it is newsworthy when a group of books is published within the critical theory campus which focusses on the current rating of Habermas's stock. These offerings by Honneth, McCarthy, and Braaten, raise significant questions about the modifications of critical theory attempted by Habermas and of the future paths for social thought.

The three books under review are united by a commitment to the key tenets of Habermas's theory of communicative action. All stress that the critique of reason should be founded in the pragmatic presuppositions of communicative language; that complex modern societies require a high degree of systems differentiation and administrative coordination; and that, in regard to politics, the project of emancipation depends on building networks that foster free and open communication. At the level of critique, however, each of these books diagnoses a different impasse in contemporary critical theory.

Axel Honneth's *The Critique of Power* is basically a history of critical theory. Published originally in Germany in 1985, it attempts to trace the issue of social conflict as it is conceptualised in the first generation of critical theory (examining the work of Horkheimer and Adorno), in post-structuralist thought (specifically Foucault's theory of power), and in the communication-theoretic turn initiated by Habermas. The guiding thread is the elucidation of a critical social theory that can comprehend both the grid of social domination and the social resources for its practical overcoming. In this connection, Honneth argues, the dynamic of 'social struggle' has consistently eluded critical social theory. This is so in the early Frankfurt School, he believes, since society is reduced there to the dimension of social labour. This leads Horkheimer and Adorno to see technological rationality as applying in all spheres of society, and thus prevents an analysis of social conflict within everyday cultural life. In the post-structuralism of Foucault, Honneth finds a new disclosure of the sphere of social interaction. Power infuses the strategic exchanges between human subjects in this perspective. Yet Foucault's critique of power, he argues, can be made intelligible only if we assume a normative standard of evaluation that this standpoint lacks. That is to say, Honneth believes that Foucault's critical claims about social control cannot be reflex-

ively grounded since they are situated outside normative understandings. In the end, then, a diagnosis of the times is presented in which social domination becomes autonomous – in Horkheimer and Adorno, through a prescientific critique of the mutilation of reason; in Foucault, through a purely systems-theoretic explanation.

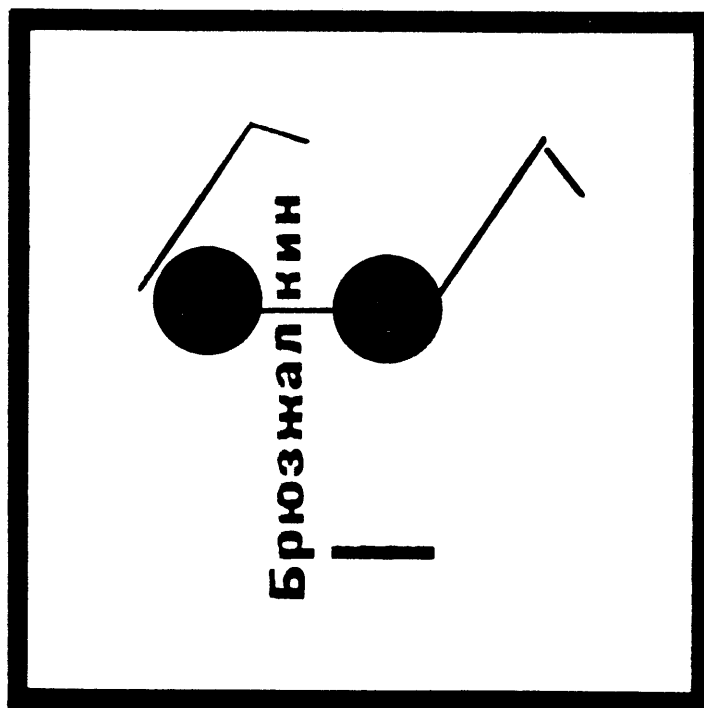
The unique feature of Habermas's work, Honneth argues, is that it allows us to see that this unquestioned coercive model of social rationalization remains dependent on processes of communicative action. That is, what Horkheimer/Adorno and Foucault mistook as society operating in a totalitarian manner is actually the restructuring of domains of action according to rules of purposive-rationality. In this connection, Honneth agrees with Habermas that 'systems reproduction' (administrative and bureaucratic institutions) has become progressively uncoupled from the communicative spheres of the 'lifeworld'. The central disturbance to social development is that the organisational domains of the economy and the state have been severed from internal

communicational requirements, and now function through a perverse, instrumentalising logic of their own. This is, in short, Habermas's thesis of the colonization of the lifeworld by systems reproduction – which is also seen by Honneth as *the* social pathology of modernity.

The crucial question then in this perspective is this: can the extremely unbalanced relationship between power complexes and their increasing penetration into the communicative foundations of the lifeworld be reversed? In a nutshell, Honneth believes the answer is yes. However, he contends that Habermas's own work fails to give due recognition to the spheres of social conflict which are so vital for any reconquest of the lifeworld through communicative action. The conceptual difficulties here concern

Habermas's attachment to systems-theory. For Honneth, the concept of system – as the 'norm-free' organisation of material reproduction through purposive-rational action – leads Habermas to break with his earlier recognition that there are no spheres of social life in which processes of intersubjective understanding are not operative. By viewing politics and the economy as purely technical, systematically steered processes of purposive-rational action, Habermas is said to disconnect these forms of social rationalization from his own theory of communicative action.

To overcome this, Honneth argues that we should interpret 'the process of rationalization as a process in which social groups struggle over the type and manner of the development and formation of social institutions'. This is a point, I think, of considerable importance to contemporary critical theory. Against Habermas's tendency to see systems integration processing the action and moral orientations of individuals, Honneth wants to recover the notion of *praxis* for rethinking constituted systems of action. That is to say, the communicative processing of actors' orientations takes place against the backdrop of social struggle. Struggle and conflict, he insists, are rooted in both the lifeworld and systems reproduction. And the potential for social transformation, Honneth concludes, depends on an institutionally medi-



ated communicative restructuring of asymmetrically distributed power.

Thomas McCarthy's new essays on contemporary critical theory also foreground the dynamics of communicative interaction. His analysis of social reproduction in *Ideals and Illusions* highlights an important distinction within system domains: formal and informal organisation. Like Habermas, McCarthy argues that the formal aspects of organisational processes – rules and regulations, systems of norms and roles, and so on – can result in damage to mechanisms of mutual understanding. However, McCarthy rejects the viewpoint that systems integration has become wholly autonomous, operating outside of communicative processes. To say that organised domains of action are not primarily structured through communicative interaction, he argues, is *not* to say that these processes are not coordinated by consensual requirements at all. The informal aspects of systems – the sentiments, needs, and desires which underpin interpersonal relations within organisations – are of key importance to the analysis of social rationalisation. Hence, for McCarthy, interaction mediated by power complexes is at once systematically and socially integrated.

The recognition of a fragility between social processes and communication leads McCarthy – billed as 'the foremost interpreter of Habermas in the English-speaking world' – to argue for a *less* formalised conception of communicative reason than Habermas has proposed. To do this, McCarthy suggests the need for a careful integration of certain post-structuralist techniques and deconstructive motifs into a critical social theory of communication. With essays on Rorty, Foucault, Heidegger, and Derrida, McCarthy contends that post-structuralist social theory illuminates the decentering effects of cultural processes in the late modern age on subjectivity and rationality. However, McCarthy's 'integration' of these social-theoretical traditions is of a typically cautious brand. He feels that post-structuralist critique is itself unintelligible without the supposition that the viewpoint criticised can be rationally justified. And he also notes that deconstruction relies on modernist assumptions about reason that it seeks to undercut. Exactly why McCarthy should want to incorporate post-structuralist social and political thought into critical theory, then, is not entirely clear. But, in any event, he contends that the deconstruction of reason, when integrated into a pragmatic approach to communication, should permit 'the socially necessary construction of concepts, theories, techniques, laws, institutions, identities, and so on with greater sensitivity to what doesn't fit neatly into our schemes'.

Disappointment is in store, I suspect, for followers of McCarthy's project. The reason for this is pragmatic. It is unlikely that critical theorists, whose primary concern is the formal structures of communicative language, will want to bother with such notions as *différance* and the Other. Similarly, many post-structuralists and postmodernists are bound to see this proposal as another rationalistic utopian fantasy, an attempt to corner the Other only to outflank it.

Jane Braaten's text offers a more general overview of Habermas's social theory. She develops a very clear and systematic exposition of the theory of communicative action, although often at the expense of some simplification. This arises partly from her concern to apply Habermas's account of the increasing

complexity of modern societies to everyday cultural life in the United States. But this concern with the application of Habermas's work to empirical research makes the book valuable, especially as an introductory guide to contemporary social thought.

Instead of developing an original perspective of her own, Braaten reviews the American reception of Habermas's work in social research. In this context, she discusses Nancy Fraser's feminist critique of Habermas's distinction between systems and the lifeworld. Here it is pointed out that many specific phenomena cross-cut the boundaries of this scheme – for example, family life is not just a network of lifeworld reproduction but is often constituted by exploitative exchanges of labour, power, sex and money. The conceptual separation of the public and private in Habermas's scheme, it is argued, goes hand in hand with traditional male values and thus poses acute problems for a feminist critical theory. Like Fraser, Braaten argues that the lifeworld and system should be seen not as 'uncoupled' but rather as interactive. It is only if we see communicative processes as deeply embedded in both personal and institutional settings, she argues, that the material conditions of human suffering can be brought to light and thus transfigured.

A great deal of ink has now been spilt on Habermas's moral vision, and on why this blueprint for emancipated communication remains unconvincing. As these books show, however, there is no one crisis in contemporary critical theory. Rather there is a range of anxieties and doubts about the social-theoretical scope of Habermas's proposals.

A key issue, though, certainly concerns systems analysis as a basis for comprehending both the steering capacity of institutions and the development of worldviews. This has its basis in Habermas's retreat from the Freudian conception of self-reflection outlined in *Knowledge and Human Interests*, and his subsequent turn to systems theory as a basis for understanding the transformations of modernity. This has led Habermas to a view of social development in which technical systems become separated from the lifeworld. Without going into detail, I would like merely to register my doubt that the problem of self and society (whether we speak of modernity or postmodernity) can be solved in this way. The view that selfhood is increasingly swallowed up by gigantic institutions has been highly influential for some time now, and Habermas's interpretation of this process is certainly more sophisticated than most. However, the idea that the personal sphere is in decline has been effectively criticised in much recent thought – the work of Castoriadis, Beck, Giddens, and Melucci is relevant here. Moreover, contemporary social formations show that women and men retain a strong capacity to create desires, meanings, and values anew. Rather than colonising human relations, then, transformations in modern institutions may well intersect with self-organisation to produce new social forms, both liberatory and repressive.

The reason all this remains opaque to contemporary critical theory, I believe, is its inadequate conception of human subjectivity and psychic life. Habermas's concern with the systems logic of worldviews and normative structures prevents a focus on the psychical organisation of the self (creative self-transformations that cannot be reduced to 'intersubjectivity'), and of how this intersects with social and political institutions. Instead, the dynamism of the social-historical world is reduced to the flatness of 'system-processes', and the self-creation of society and institutions is eradicated. From this angle, it seems to me, the key limitation of the books under review is clear: tinkering with Habermas's communications model will not do the trick if the relations between self and society are distinctly different from those presupposed – as they typically are in the modern world.

Anthony Elliott



THE ONTOPATHOLOGY OF EVERYDAY LIFE

Hubert L. Dreyfus, *Being-in-the-World: A Commentary on Heidegger's *Being and Time*, Division One*, London, MIT Press, 1990. 370pp., £26.95 pb, 0 262 54056 8.

Probably the best way to foment strife amongst philosophers is to get them to say what they think of Martin Heidegger. At one extreme, of course, there are devotees, for whom philosophising is practically equivalent to an esoteric re-reading of Heidegger's works. He spent his whole life, after all, lamenting the anaesthetised idiocies of twentieth-century common sense, so one hardly has the right to complain if it is not quick or easy to comprehend him.

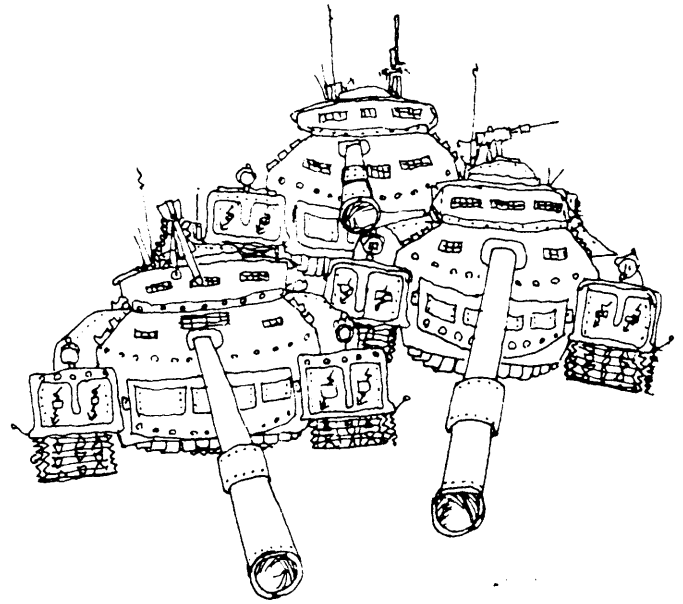
On the other hand, there is the old Oxfordian establishment, which regards all this agonising as just typical of 'Continental Philosophy': deep-sounding confusionism which may appeal to emotions like faith and hope, but which contradicts that greatest of intellectual virtues: clarity. Heidegger's unrepentant Nazism then gives them a heaven-sent excuse for their philosophical insularity.

But there is also an increasingly influential band of moderates and eclectics, who treat Heidegger without either reverence or scorn. Though they subscribe to many of the intellectual ideals of analytic philosophy, they find Heidegger useful, instructive, and even rather sensible. In *Being and Time* (1927), Heidegger gave some compelling descriptions of how experience is always situated, historical, and practical, even when it takes itself to be entirely abstract, formal and theoretical. These themes, they point out, have a lot in common with the outlook that led American pragmatists to desacralise meaning and truth, or the later Wittgenstein to present language as a jungle of social practices with no over-riding nature or purpose at all. Heidegger, on this interpretation, is part of the twentieth century's journey of disenchantment with the idea of theoretical reason.

No one has done more to establish this clubbable version of Heidegger than Hubert Dreyfus. For more than twenty-five years, he has been developing a kind of applied Heideggerianism, particularly in a celebrated campaign against the claims of Artificial Intelligence: 'Computers must have bodies in order to be intelligent,' as he put it long ago. (See *What Computers Can't Do: A Critique of Artificial Reason*, 1971.) Throughout this period, Dreyfus has been giving courses on *Being and Time* at Berkeley, and in 1968 he started circulating his lecture notes. Like the lectures themselves, these transcripts were very popular, and had a wide unofficial circulation. They have been regularly revised, and at last they have been published. They distil many years of engaging, lucid and imaginative advocacy, and will be welcomed by all those who want a reassuring guide to Heidegger.

Dreyfus's Heidegger is the inventor of a novel 'ontology', designed to replace a 'misunderstanding of human being' which began with 'Plato's fascination with theory', continued under Descartes and Husserl, and which still benights contemporary information technology. Heidegger's new 'theory of being' urges us to forsake formalism and 'return to the phenomenon of everyday human activity'. The story is that traditional ontology was obsessed with reducing everything to mind or matter or a mixture of the two. For Heidegger, however, there were not one or two kinds of being, but three: first, the sheer existence (or *Dasein*) of human beings; second, the 'readiness to hand' of the things that make up the unnoticed practical background of everyday living (or their *availability*, to adopt one of Dreyfus's many helpful amendments of the standard translation); and third, the 'presence-at-hand' of the objects of abstract theorising (which Dreyfus calls

their 'occurrentness'). Pre-Heideggerian philosophers made, and continue to make, the mistake of interpreting human existence in terms of occurrent objects, and so they overlook the fundamental significance of our 'everyday skilful coping' with the available world. Traditionally, Dreyfus says, philosophers have assumed that there must be some 'ultimate ground of intelligibility', and they have sought it in entities like 'the Good, God, or the transcendental ego'; but Heidegger shows that this search is unnecessary. The only basis our experience has, or needs to have, is 'simply shared practices'.



Heidegger's ontology, on this interpretation, is a monument to the self-sufficiency of practical daily life. Its affinities are not so much with the *völkisch* elements of Nazism, as with the folksy anti-industrialism of Thoreau or Morris or Leavis. *Being and Time* becomes a Germanic *Wheelwright's Shop*, and Heidegger sounds remarkably like a liberal intellectual who might be alive today, and teaching in California.

Although he describes his book as a commentary, Dreyfus does not plod through the whole of *Being and Time*, faults and all. Instead he swoops on the passages he considers most useful, and warns us off the rest. However, some of the parts he skips could make a lot of difference. In particular, whilst offering a defence of what he calls 'Heidegger's ontology', he does not notice that one of Heidegger's aims in *Being and Time* was to cast doubt on the very idea of ontology. Heidegger said that he had two tasks in *Being and Time*. The first was to 'lay bare' the question of Being and resuscitate its 'questionhood'; the second, to show that ontology is itself an evasion of the great question. In one of the sections that Dreyfus neglects, Heidegger described this second

task as the 'de-construction' (*Destruktion*) of the history of ontology. He was thus suggesting that *Being and Time* should be read as reviving the question of questions, rather than supplying a new answer to it. The last thing he wanted to do, in other words, was to add his own 'ontology' to those that already cluttered the histories of philosophy.

Being and Time proceeds by arguing that any response to the question of Being is actually a way of showing what, or rather who, you take yourself to be – even if you deride the question in the name of self-abnegating objectivity. You define your own being as a questioner – your *Dasein* – by your attitude towards ontology. This means that when Heidegger discusses the 'ontology of *Dasein*', the 'of' should give us pause. Everything he strove for turns on it. For what he was trying to present was not his own favoured theory of Being, but *Dasein*'s deluded sense of itself. *Being and Time* is about *Dasein*'s ontology, not Heidegger's.

There is a self-consuming ironism about *Being and Time*, which Dreyfus misses. He admires Heidegger for articulating, before Wittgenstein, the idea that 'the source of the intelligibility of the world is the average public practices through which alone there can be any understanding at all'. The problem is that Heidegger regarded everyday intelligibility with contempt: 'in everydayness,' he said, 'everything is all one and the same, but whatever the day may bring is treated as diversification.' Everydayness was the fatuous philosophy which prides itself on having finally settled what are actually endlessly unsettling questions: it has always made up its mind about matters which are really absurd. The everyday understandings with which *Dasein* feels at home belong, according to Heidegger, with gossip, 'idle writing', and the inauthentic 'they-self'.

For once, Dreyfus's patience gets ruffled. Heidegger, he claims, is doing 'everything he can' to confound the 'important

distinction' between conformity and conformism: the most egregious rebellion, after all, is constituted by reference to public norms. So he treats Heidegger's contempt for the routines of everyday intelligibility as a lapse, which it is kindest to ignore.

But it may be misguided to try to help Heidegger out in this way. For, in the first place, Dreyfus's selective interpretation spoils the careful design of *Being and Time*. Apart from a curious appendix on Kierkegaard, Dreyfus completely ignores the second of the book's two Divisions. But Division One is entitled a 'preparatory analysis', and Heidegger evidently meant its presentation of everydayness to contain gaps and partialities. Apparently these faults were to be exposed in Division Two, where everyday intelligibility is shown shattering itself on the rock of 'being-towards-death', and worldly philosophies of history, particularly Hegel's, reveal themselves as overblown versions of the evasiveness of daily life.

Dreyfus tries to justify his neglect of Division Two on the ground that it contains 'errors so serious as to block any consistent reading'. He may of course be right about the errors; but still, the worst of errors may be far more interesting than the best of certainties. In any case, errors can be built into magnificent philosophical structures, and whoever passes them by may be missing something important. In any case, the parts of *Being and Time* which Dreyfus does not reach may not be so wrong-headed as he thinks. They are uncomfortable, of course: prickly reminders of doubt, difficulty, and awe – quite at odds with the easy-going intellectual companionship evoked by Dreyfus. But after all, it need not be such a bad idea, from time to time, to put some distance between ourselves and what Heidegger called 'the comfortableness of the customary'.

Jonathan Rée

OTHER CITIES

John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason*, Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1990. 443pp., £45 hb, 0 6311 4573 7.

John Milbank's *Theology and Social Theory* is a profound and provocative essay in Christian apologetics. Early Christian apologists used the resources of Greek philosophy to defend Christianity within a pagan intellectual culture, and Milbank, writing within what he sees as a secular culture, employs the most radical currents of contemporary thought to the end of redefining radical politics as a Christian 'ecclesiology'. In conscious imitation of Augustine in the *City of God*, Milbank would show that the 'neopaganism' of 'secular reason' has spent itself, both intellectually and as a project for radical politics. From out of the ruins of secular reason and the nihilism of its agonistic culture, Milbank would retrieve a theologically informed thinking, and a practice founded upon the organisational prescriptions of ecclesiology and its peaceful 'other city' of the church.

This is an extremely important work which intervenes decisively in the current exhaustion of radical thought and politics. Much of its challenge lies in the uncompromising way in which Milbank argues from the premiss of the exhaustion of secular reason to theological and religious conclusions. His genealogy of secular reason shows how its incapacity to think the absolute severely qualifies its imagination of community and makes it vulnerable to nihilism. Theology, however, offers a site both for thinking the absolute and for imagining a peaceful community,

and opens theoretical and practical horizons beyond the nihilistic *impasse* of secular reason.

There are nevertheless three grounds for questioning both the premisses and the conclusions of *Theology and Social Theory*. The first is Milbank's strategy of reading which privileges the discourse of theology over 'secular reason'. This reserves to theology all insight into the aporias of 'secular reason', systematically underestimating the reflexive resources of the secular tradition. Secondly, 'secular reason' is treated as a monolith, and not as a plural and internally differentiated tradition of thought. Finally, it is not only Milbank's genealogy of 'secular reason' that is open to question, but also his theological rethinking of community as an ecclesiology, as an alignment of peace and charity with the pastoral structure of the church.

Milbank's strategy of reading appears extremely questionable, even unethical. In almost 450 pages there is hardly a full sentence cited from any of the authors discussed and criticised. This makes it difficult for the texts under scrutiny to disrupt the theological narrative, and reduces the reader's chances of judging between narrative and citation. The monological effect of the narrative puts in question not only the account of secular reason, but also the openness of the alternative theology and ecclesiology. For the protestations of respect for difference and alterity, for charity, are made within a space in which textual difference and alterity have been uncharitably suspended.

Milbank's account of 'secular reason' is nevertheless exciting and compelling, but only as an edifying discourse which builds its

reader up without allowing itself to be broken. If it attended to the complex and internally differentiated traditions of thought which it identifies as 'secular reason' then how could it be so sure of its own voice? Perhaps without this demonised secular other Milbank's theology would itself be bereft; perhaps it is parasitic in the same way as Augustine's Christian City of God was parasitic upon a collapsing, pagan Empire? For the texts and the cultures which Milbank collects under the title 'secular' are themselves too diverse and contradictory to form this other to theology without violating their differences. The 'secular' is not a single empire, but a plurality, a name given to several coexisting cities.



These points may be illustrated with reference to Milbank's casting of Kant and Nietzsche as foundationalist and anti-foundationalist philosophers (a topos repeated in another recent work of radical theology, Kevin Hart's *The Trespass of the Sign*). Kant is alleged to develop an account of knowledge and action which ultimately relies on the foundations laid by a human subject while 'Nietzschean genealogy ... refuses to tell these Kantian and Hegelian (or sociological and Marxist) stories about a constant human subject'. For Milbank, Nietzsche and alleged 'Nietzscheans' such as Heidegger, Deleuze, Lyotard, Foucault, and Derrida replace the knowing and acting subject with 'power' and so betray the nihilistic truth of 'secular reason'.

Such readings of Kant and Nietzsche offer a persuasive narrative, and are fast becoming orthodoxy. But they repress the aporetic character of both Kant's and Nietzsche's texts. The 'Kantian' knowing and acting subject is in a state of crisis and disorientation, and the critical philosophy is a diagnostic exploration of this condition. Kant is not trying to establish a constant human subject, nor does he see in it the source of reliable foundations for knowing and acting. Similarly with Nietzsche,

whose thought of eternal return is intended to disturb accepted notions of power, and is far from prescribing them as legitimate successors to the subject.

Milbank's investment in the unproblematic identity of secular reason arises from the prescriptive ambition of his text. Secular reason and its nihilistic culture rests upon an anti-Christian *mythos* which first emerged as a humanistic defence of the subject (culminating in Kant) but which, through not acknowledging itself as religious, degenerated into the 'malign mythology' of an 'ontology of violence'. In its place Milbank proposes an alternative *mythos*, an ecclesiology without foundations embodying an 'ontology of peace'. However, the need for the latter only emerges if we concede the premiss of a secular *mythos* informing the tradition of modern thought. If we argue, on the contrary, that modern thinking is diverse and irreducible to the embodiment of a single *mythos*, then the need for a theologically informed alternative is open to dispute.

The presentation of the alternative *mythos* which emerges in the course of *Theology and Social Theory* can be questioned on historical and theoretical grounds. Milbank sees in Christian ecclesiology the possibility of imagining 'a different kind of community', one founded in charity and its embodiment in 'the peace of the Church':

Instead of a peace 'achieved' through the abandonment of the losers, the subordination of potential rivals and resistance to enemies, the Church provides a genuine peace by its memory of all the victims, its equal concern for all its citizens (*sic*) and its self-exposed offering of reconciliation to enemies.

This imagined community is not one of agapic anarchy, but is a 'sphere for the operation of charity'. This sphere 'requires substantive norms for society, and indeed (dare it be said) a continuous exercise of 'pastoral' oversight'. Milbank is aware of the provocative character of this call for 'pastoral oversight' (by whom, for whom?) which he disturbingly presents as a supplement to the secular functions of 'power and public discipline'. But he is anxious to distinguish this vision of community from a reactionary 'romantic-mediaevalist' return to pre-modern forms of religious regulation.

Milbank's paradigmatic community is less the bureaucratic mediaeval Church than the monastery – his model of 'pastoral oversight' derives from the 'direction of desire' assumed by the novice in monastic discipline. He distinguishes between the pastoral disciplines of the Church – organised in terms of formal law – and that of the monastic communities. To sustain this argument he must refute Foucault's claim in *The History of Sexuality* that the Church was the 'first form of a disciplinary society, wielding its rule over its members by knowledge and surveillance'. Milbank concedes this point for the Church of the high middle ages, but claims apologetically that 'one cannot necessarily see such an outcome as latent in Christianity from the start':

certain questions arise about Foucault's understanding of Christianity as preparing the way for a 'disciplinary' society. The monastic relation of director to novice, marked by the disciplining of desire, required a constant and particular shepherding of the one by the other. Sometimes, in the early Church, this form of intimate guidance was extended by the holy man to lay Christians also. But Foucault does not really reckon with the gap between this and the later, late-mediaeval regulation of populations according to a tightly normalized systematization of 'inner' attitudes and motivations, along with a regular system of penitential exercises.

This critique accurately exposes Foucault's failure thoroughly to examine the 'gap' between monastic and ecclesial discipline. But Milbank's own distinction between the two – one emphasising particularity and assent, the other the formal disciplining of bodies by knowledge and law – is itself open to question.

Milbank's historical narrative implies the fall of a sacramental monastic community into the formal legal disciplinary practices of the mediaeval Church. He describes early in his book 'the increasing failure of the Church to be the Church, to preserve the "rule of the Gospel" in the monasteries, and somehow to extend this to the laity'. Yet the reforms of the eleventh century were prosecuted by the monastic faction in the Church and aimed at extending monastic discipline to lay society, in effect converting Christendom into a giant monastery. In order to do so a historically unprecedented administrative machine was elaborated, not as the betrayal of monastic discipline, but its realisation. This machinery collapsed in the Reformation, when, as Weber has shown, the mode of monastic discipline changed from canon law and sacramental bureaucracy to the self-disciplining of the individual subject. The crucial point here is that it is not possible to make a historically founded distinction between monastic and church discipline. And if this is the case, then Milbank's legitimisation of alternative imaginations of community within the Christian, theological tradition loses some of its force.

While not wishing to veer to the opposite extreme and to agree

with Foucault that the disciplinary society was 'latent' to Christianity, it does seem that the formal and substantive regulation of communities provokes difficulties which the theological tradition is ill-equipped to understand. The appreciation of these difficulties is the partial and flawed achievement of modern philosophy and social theory. They provide a site from which to reflect upon the vicissitudes of modern community, vicissitudes which in the West are largely the outcome of the limitations of Christian culture and its inadequate self-reflection in theology. Milbank's 'other city' should remember not only *the* victims, but *its* victims; but were it to do so it would no longer be a Church but a *Polis*, and the appropriate mode of self-reflection would be political and not theological.

Theology and Social Theory makes a significant contribution to re-thinking the political. By challenging the limits of modern politics and its theoretical reflection it affords its 'secular' readers a position from which to judge their own tradition. It extends the canon of philosophy and social theory to include theological texts previously overlooked but which now seem increasingly relevant to the critical analysis of modernity. Even if its critique of the secular tradition and its imagination of other forms of community remain questionable, its publication marks an important moment in the re-casting of philosophical and political radicalism.

Howard Caygill

HISTORY IS PUNK

Andrew Ross, *Strange Weather: Culture, Science and Technology in the Age of Limits*. London, Verso, 1991. 275pp., £32.95 hb, £10.95 pb, 0 86091 354 6 hb, 0 86091 567 0 pb.

Larry McCaffery (ed.), *Storming the Reality Studio*, London, Duke University Press, 1991. 387pp., £45 hb, £14.95 pb, 0 8223 1158 5 hb, 0 8223 1168 2 pb.

As their titles suggest, these books present very different perspectives on the present and future of science and technology. While McCaffery is storming reality and exploring the further reaches of the literary and technological imagination, Ross is concerned to limit both the real and the possible. *Strange Weather* begins with a tale of two signs: one which advises humans to 'keep cool and say nice things' to temperamental photocopying machines, the other inviting them to recycle their waste paper. It is 'the dialogue between these two messages' which guides this book, exhorting us to be nice to both nature and technology in case we push either beyond an untenable limit.

This is a fascinating area of thought, not least because of the remarkable cross section of tendencies, writings, disciplines and interests which emerges from any discussion of the cultural impact of technological development. Ross casts his net wide: across cyberpunk fiction and New Age living, computer hacking, futurology, and environmental decay, all of which require the radical re-examination of the most treasured philosophical foundations by which the Western subject has oriented itself. It is of course the extent to which these themes set new agendas and demand new ways of thinking which interests Ross, but there is little innovation on either front in this book. Instead, he reiterates a predictable and rather vague left humanism; a perspective which confronts its limits and questions its foundations only in order to convince itself of its own value. The consequence of this is that Ross's concern for humanity conceals another and overriding agenda: the promotion of a milieu of left cultural criticism with

which he never tires of associating himself. With disarming arrogance he peppers his writing with references to 'our special critical knowledge of the way cultural meanings are produced', and 'our traditional responsibility to think about a better future', so that when he then declares, for example, that only 'through attention to individual rights can we build a radical democracy', serious doubts arise about the inclusiveness of the 'we' with and for whom Ross assumes he is writing. While he makes frequent reference to the importance of a future in which environmental and human difference will be allowed to flourish, his tone raises suspicions about who is really defining this 'better future', and on whose behalf; and whether the left intelligentsia's 'traditional responsibility' for thinking about it might itself be thrown into question by the very issues and developments considered in this book. Ross's inability to deal with these questions suggests that perspectives developed long before the strange weathers of this book began to sweep the planet might no longer be adequate to their analysis.

One of the most interesting issues discussed in *Strange Weather* is cyberpunk, also the pervading theme of *Storming the Reality Studio*. This strange end of science fiction has quickly developed a set of fascinating interests and vocabularies which almost qualifies it as a world view. As such it is attracting a good deal of critical interest, of which these books are obvious examples. Ross criticises cyberpunk as a 'boystown' phenomenon, endorsing claims that its authors, particularly William Gibson, are 'politically irresponsible' when they refuse to limit their thinking about the technological and cultural developments of the present and future on political, ethical, or any humanist grounds at all. McCaffery's anthology, however, is a large and enthusiastic collection of cyberpunk material, fiction and non-fiction, with a list of authors which includes Burroughs (author of the title), Gibson, Ballard, Acker, Derrida, Lyotard, and Leary, and essays which consider the cyberpunk phenomenon as an interface with

the postmodern. Both challenge human identity and the boundaries of space, time, meaning, and reality; both are aware of the extent to which accelerating technological developments demand what McCaffery, in his excellent introduction, describes as a 'radical rethinking' of the basic paradigms and metaphors of the Western mind. But the fictional writings collected here are often far more adventurous in their speculations and incisive in their analyses than those offered by the commentators, and the most interesting pieces, like Porush's 'Frothing the Synaptic Bath' and McCaffery's interview with William Gibson, are those which in some sense point beyond the postmodern as the inevitable discourse within which 'things cyber' can be discussed. Postmodernism might even be said to be the most unsuited to a genre characterised by explorations of the outer reaches of the real, the possibilities that do indeed lie beyond the text. Novelists

like Gibson are able to storm the reality studio and explore the implications of cyborgs, cyberspace, and what might be meant by a cybernetic world in terms which escape the postmodern critic: the cyberpunks are already exploring a deterritorialisation which postmodernism is still hoping is impossible. The global information flows of cyberspace are with us now; the urban cyberpunk futures of drugs, bars, neon, and coveted alienation are in our streets as much as our films; and while cyborgs are still largely the province of popular film, the sight of Virtual Reality data-glove wearers, kids wired into Game Boys, and arcade freaks feeding back through video games makes postmodernism's claims about the death of the subject more real and immediate than was ever intended.

Sadie Plant

THE REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS TO COME

Ernst Bloch, *Heritage of Our Times*, translated by Neville and Stephen Plaice, Cambridge, Polity Press, 1991. xiv + 377pp., £39.50 hb, 0 7456 0553 2.

Richard H. Roberts, *Hope and Its Hieroglyph. A Critical Decipherment of Ernst Bloch's 'Principle of Hope'* (American Academy of Religion, Studies in Religion No. 57), Scholars Press, Atlanta, GA, 1990. xv + 248pp., \$20.95 hb, \$13.95 pb, 1 55540 369 7 hb, 1 55540 370 0 pb.

Ernst Bloch is often portrayed as a utopian thinker in the pejorative sense of the word. One of the many virtues of *Heritage of Our Times* is that it goes some way towards correcting this misconception. Initially published as *Erbschaft dieser Zeit* in Zurich in 1935 (when Bloch was in exile), it was later subjected to reworking and in 1962 appeared as the fourth volume of the Ernst Bloch *Gesamtausgabe*. It is upon this later expanded version that the present translation is based.

The range of thinkers and themes dealt with by Bloch in this work is not as great as that of *The Principle of Hope* and it is unlike the latter in that it consists largely of an expressionist montage of essays written over the period from 1924 to 1940, with the bulk of them dating from the early thirties. It is the essays from the late 1920s which have the most bearing on our perception of the nature of Bloch as a thinker. Rather than the utopian flights from reality which some critics would have us expect, they contain acute cultural and social analyses of the Germany of the time and in their vision of the awakening Blond Beast slouching toward Berlin to be born they border on the prescient.

Bloch's attempt to account for the popular appeal of National Socialism forms the core of the book. He thought that in failing to appeal to certain images and ideas from the past which were still potent in the present, the Left had abandoned a vast field of cultural material to the Nazis. The dialectical tensions of the present do not just point forward toward the Not-Yet-Become of an undecided future, they also indicate a legacy from the past through the existence of what Bloch calls objectively and subjectively non-synchronous contradictions. Objectively non-synchronous contradictions arise from elements of previous social formations which are still present in modern society. Subjectively non-synchronous contradictions manifest the accumulated rage born of the frustrated hopes of the past. Whilst for Bloch the relations fundamental to capitalism (wage-labour – capital; bourgeoisie – proletariat) certainly dominate the modern world, he does not see a single contradiction as being the key to its developmental

tendencies; rather he thinks that there is a polyrhythmic, multi-layered dialectic. In suggesting that 'We do not all live in the same Now', Bloch shares with Benjamin the radical rejection of any interpretation of history as consisting of a linear progress through distinct stages. Indeed, some comments of Benjamin in a letter to Alfred Cohn (18 July 1935) seem to suggest that he thought that in *Heritage of Our Times* Bloch was too close for comfort!

Throughout Bloch's writings there is unquestionably great emphasis on the future, on the emergence of the New from the potentialities of the present. However, the important role of the past in his thought has perhaps been insufficiently stressed. Bloch fills the silence of Marxism on the content of the future society with voices from the past. The dialectic of a particular society's history is aimed toward an open future through the anticipatory pre-appearance (*Vor-Schein*) of that future, not just in art, religion and philosophy, but also in material such as the fairy stories and colportage of popular culture. Bloch thinks that, insofar as it contains a utopian surplus of unrealised hope-content, the superstructure can be *in advance* of the base. This is not only true of Marxism, but also of much of the cultural material of early and pre-capitalist society which must thereby be recovered and put to use in the service of revolution. Many of Bloch's works can be seen as devoted to rectifying the errors of omission identified in *Heritage of Our Times*; for example, his recovery of the radical messianic tradition of Christianity for Marxism in *Thomas Münzer als Theologe der Revolution* (1921) and *Atheism in Christianity* (1968) or of the natural law tradition in *Natural Law and Human Dignity* (1961). For Bloch, the unfulfilled dreams of previous social formations can still be factors in the social consciousness of a society and any attempt to direct the course of development of that society must take due account of them.

The categories elaborated by Bloch in this work continue to be of relevance – not so much in the West as in the fragmenting former Soviet Union. The re-emergence of so much of the history and culture of its peoples in revived nationalisms only reinforces Bloch's emphasis on the crucial need for a critical appropriation and refunctioning, rather than suppression, of what has gone before in any attempt to build the New.

Whilst the factors in German society and culture which gave rise to National Socialism are the guiding theme for the entire work, many of the individual essays which make up *Heritage of Our Times* are also of interest in their own right. There are Bloch's contributions to the 'Expressionism Debate' and essays dealing with Brecht, Joyce, Stravinsky and Jung, among others. The

section on 'Philosophies of Unrest, Process, Dionysus' contrasts interestingly with Lukács's account of irrationalist philosophy in *The Destruction of Reason* and that on 'Mystery-mongering as a Large-scale Enterprise' in 'Occult Fantasticality and Paganism' has increased in relevance with the emergence of the 'New Age'.

The depth of Bloch's thought across many artificial boundaries between disciplines has meant that it has attracted interest from very different perspectives. There are those who are attracted to his particular version of Marxism and those who are fascinated by his appropriation of religion. This dual nature of Bloch-reception in the English-speaking world was evident in some of the material first selected to be translated into English (see the collections of articles *On Karl Marx* and *Man on His Own. Essays on the Philosophy of Religion*) and it is not surprising to find a similar range of interests manifesting itself in the secondary literature. Following Wayne Hudson's recently reprinted *The Marxist Philosophy of Ernst Bloch* (London, 1982), Richard H. Roberts's *Hope and Its Hieroglyph: A Critical Decipherment of Ernst Bloch's 'Principle of Hope'* examines Bloch's *magnum opus* largely from a religious point of view. Roberts thinks that *The Principle of Hope* must be interpreted with central emphasis on the role of refunctioned religion within it and sees Bloch's Marxism as peripheral, if not actually irrelevant, to the central thrust of Bloch's thought (at least in this work): 'Marxism is rhetorically present but in substantial terms predominantly supportive, even marginal.'

After an outline of Bloch's life and writings, which concentrates on those works which preceded *The Principle of Hope*, Roberts proceeds with five chapters devoted to an examination of the categories developed by Bloch in the first volume, with chapter three containing a particularly helpful treatment of Bloch's appropriation and critique of Freud. This section is followed by a single chapter on the second volume and then two on the last. Roberts has got the balance about right in giving more space to explicating the structure of the first volume, but perhaps loses his way a bit after that point. How he thinks one stage of *The Principle of Hope* follows on from the next is no longer so clear in the later chapters as it was in the earlier. One of the strong points of the book is undoubtedly that it emphasises that *The Principle of Hope* has a *structure* and that it is not merely a catalogue or encyclopedia of dreams and utopias. However, the failure to maintain a convincing account of this structure is perhaps partly due to Roberts's comparison of the structure of *The Principle of Hope* to

that of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, seeing the first volume as providing a deduction of categories and the last as presenting what are effectively regulative ideas. However, it is perhaps more fruitful to compare *The Principle of Hope* to Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, that is, to see it as a materialist 'phenomenology of the wish', moving from the immediacy of simple daydreams to the 'absolute wish' for the coming of the Kingdom in Marxism. In general the earlier sections are much better than the later, indeed towards the end one gets the impression of a rushed job. There are careless mistakes in the transcriptions of passages from the English translation of *The Principle of Hope* (see for example the quotations given on pages 81, 168, 169, 200 and 207) and this means that it is sometimes necessary to have a copy of *The Principle of Hope* to hand in order to check Roberts's work.

As well as making suggestions as to the German idealist background of much of Bloch's thought, *Hope and Its Hieroglyph* attempts to locate it in relation to twentieth-century philosophical and theological developments. However, its references to parallels with other thinkers are often vague, at least to someone unfamiliar with the likes of Barth, Bultmann and Tillich; even in a self-avowed introductory work such as this, suggestions of comparisons between Bloch and other thinkers need to be expanded considerably. Roberts perhaps assumes too much background knowledge on the part of the reader. There could have been many more references to both secondary literature in English and to the vast amount of material available on Bloch in German. In general I found the references to be quite idiosyncratic, perhaps saying more about Roberts's interests than about Bloch himself.

Roberts's book is unusual among the secondary monographs on Bloch in that it deals with one particular work rather than a period or theme. Given the continuity of Bloch's thought throughout his life, his editing and republishing of earlier works and systematic self-quotation, it could be argued that any attempt to treat of one work in isolation will be relatively unfruitful. Particularly when dealing with Bloch's thought, there is perhaps a great danger of mistaking a part for the whole and thereby misunderstanding the whole. As well as needing better references to the secondary literature, *Hope and Its Hieroglyph* does not direct the reader adequately to other writings of Bloch where he develops certain ideas to be found in *The Principle of Hope* or to earlier themes which he expands upon in it.

I must admit that sometimes I found it harder to understand

Roberts than Bloch himself (no mean feat on Roberts's part!). In particular I do not think it is very clear what Roberts's view of the role of Marxism in the thought of Bloch is. He differentiates his approach from that of Hudson in the following terms: 'Whereas Wayne Hudson regards Bloch primarily as a reformer of Marxism, by contrast we approach him more as a "refunctioner" of grandiose German cultural ambitions within the setting of Marxism'. In what does Bloch's 'reform' of Marxism consist, if not precisely in this refunctioning? Whilst Roberts is unquestionably better than Hudson on the religious origins of many of Bloch's ideas, he underplays the Marxist dimension and perhaps suffers from an impoverished view of what the Marxist setting of Bloch's thought actually is. I see this problem as related to Roberts's belief that Bloch 'accorded particular weight to Kant', rather than



Hegel. In keeping with the approach I advocated earlier, I do not believe it irrelevant that Bloch completed a major study of Hegel (*Subjekt – Objekt*) several years before the first volume of *The Principle of Hope* was published. When Roberts says that Bloch's optimism foundered 'on the rocks of individual and collective human depravity' or that he and Marx failed 'to engage with the inevitability of alienation', without any attempt to deal with Bloch's Hegelian-Marxist subject-object dialectics, then I find his thought, rather than Bloch's, to be 'grossly inadequate'. Bloch sees every objective social condition as shaped by, and shaping, the activity of the subject whose imagination is not yet exhausted. It seems to me that the whole drift of Bloch's thought is against the very idea that anything can be said to be inevitable in the human world; and it is this strong anti-determinist view of social reality which opens the possibility of the emergence of the New. Against Roberts, I do not think that for Bloch 'a Marxist realisation' is simply implied by the 'universality of the anticipatory category', rather I think that Marxism is deeply embedded in his thought. It is only the work of Marx as concrete utopia, as future-oriented dialectics, which has made possible the elaboration of the category of the 'Not-Yet', the discovery of the horizon of the future in the present and the recovery of the anticipatory dimensions of the culture of the past. 'The Archimedean Point' from which the world can be moved, namely, the insight that knowledge is 'related not only to what is past but essentially to what is coming up', is an insight of Marx's which meshes with Bloch's

own early thought. Even if Bloch suggests that some of these ideas were not developed by Marx himself as much as they should have been, this in no way warrants our thinking that Bloch was simply reading his own thoughts into Marx or looking for support there. Bloch never abandoned the claim to be a Marxist and I do not believe that his Marxist assertions can be as easily dismissed as Roberts thinks, nor do I believe that Marxism and refunctioned religion are in opposition in Bloch's thought; rather, it seems to me that the whole attempt to 'refunction' religion only makes sense when understood in the light of the goal of social revolution. While aspects of Kant are unquestionably of great importance for Bloch, Roberts's positing of an antinomy between Marxism and religion seems to me to be itself much too Kantian. We might better understand Bloch's thought in its fractured totality as containing a dialectic which consists of his early religious interests, his encounter with, and adoption of, Marxism, and a re-reading and re-emphasis of earlier enthusiasms in the light of Marxism. Bloch's insistence in *Atheism in Christianity* that 'Only an atheist can be a good Christian, only a Christian can be a good atheist' (which incidentally Roberts misquotes in the German) surely means that Bloch himself did not see a great tension between his Marxism and his appropriation of the radical/mystical stream of Christianity; Roberts does not demonstrate that there was one.

Colin M. Harper

IMAGINARY POLITICS

Richard Kearney, *Poetics of Imagining from Husserl to Lyotard*, London, Harper Collins, 1991. xiii + 233pp., £30 hb, £9.95 pb, 0 04 4454450 3 hb, 0 04 445451 1 pb.

A book's importance can be measured by its persistence. You see it in everything you read, you hear it in conversations, and you use it to try and explain difficult issues. This is the effect of this book. The author forces you to see that imagination is not some tangential issue within the history of philosophy, but the guiding principle of philosophy itself.

Though this book is one of a sequence in which Kearney has tried to show the centrality of the imagination, it does work on its own and also fits perfectly within the aims of the editors of the series 'Problems of Modern European Thought', which is to introduce the themes of Continental philosophy to an uninitiated audience. This book is introductory in its lucid and concise style, but not in what it asks the reader to think.

Why is imagination so significant for the author? The answer is a Heideggerian one: 'The questioning of imagining resembles the question of being.' It is temporality that links the two questions together. I could neither project myself into the future nor recollect a past without imagination, since it is imagination that frees me from the constraints of the present. Freedom is possible only because of this stretching of the temporal horizon of human existence which allows possibilities to emerge beyond the actual. This introduces us to the most important theme of the book: that imagination opens up a politics of the future, a politics that leaps beyond the chains of the present to conceive of a more just society.

The book is divided into two parts, the first investigating imagination in relation to phenomenology through Husserl, Sartre and Merleau-Ponty, and the second, hermeneutics and postmodernism through Ricoeur, Lyotard, Vattimo and Kristeva.

Without imagination, the author declares, phenomenology 'cannot be understood'. The basis of the phenomenological

method is the notion of intentionality, the relation of the subject to an object. If imagination is no longer confused with a form of perception, where the image is considered only as the residue of a sense impression, then intentionality is essentially an imaginative activity. The importance of this activity for Husserl, as the author points out, is that without it there would be no possibility of grasping the essence of the object at all, since to grasp the essence of an object is to transcend that object to an imaginary universal essence. Imagination is that which permits eidetic phenomenology.

The political content of this phenomenology is freedom. What essentially differentiates human existence from the natural order is freedom, and freedom here means the possibility of imagining the actual as different, the possibility of imagining different worlds, different possibilities. This is the basic meaning of Sartre's distinction between Being in itself and Being for itself. The human being is different from a table, because the table is what is, whereas I can be other to myself, no matter what objective description has been given of me. This is the basic meaning of transcendence – 'the possibility of the unreal – or the-other-than-real – which provides us with the freedom to found the real'. Nonetheless there is a danger in both Husserl's and Sartre's thought at this point. When the active function of self consciousness is emphasised, the object simply becomes a projection of self consciousness. Thus, both Husserl and Sartre fall into the danger of solipsism. The ideal becomes literally a fiction, and there is no question of how the ideal becomes real, of the 'transition', to use Kearney's word, between the world in which I live now and an ideal one, that is to say, between facticity, which constrains choice, and projection, being towards the possible. This is because the ideal is seen here as only a negation, the absence of the object, and not as having any reality at all. The advantage of the phenomenology of Bachelard is that in it the image does not surpass the real for the sake of nothingness but for a new reality.

The future ceases to be seen merely as a negation of the present, as an empty abstraction, but contained within the present. For Bachelard this is the basic experience of poetics. Creativity destroys the banality of the present by making us see objects in a different light, objects that have been covered over by familiarity. However, we would never know how creativity engages with the real unless we had some conception of the critical insight of imagination. Therefore, there must be a dialectical relation between imagination and reality, and not an abstract separation of them, as there seems to be in Sartre and Husserl. As Kearney reminds us, Merleau-Ponty's work shows us the excessive nature of Sartre's existentialism, the emptiness of his freedom. Every human individual, no matter how free, is also a 'creature of human history', already constrained by social relations of which it is not the origin.

It is in this context that Kearney introduces the work of Paul Ricoeur. Until Ricoeur the thematic of imagination had been dominated by the metaphor of sight, but now it must be thought of in terms of language, through the idea of 'semantic innovation'. The movement beyond the given is essentially verbal: 'The poetic imagination liberates the reader into a free space of possibility, suspending the reference to the immediate world of perception and thereby disclosing "new ways of being in the world".' But may not these new possibilities be just as empty as what is being transcended, or even worse a mere repetition of the present that has merely disguised itself as something novel? This is where the idea of a 'radical hermeneutics' enters, which the author conceives as a riposte to the nihilism of postmodernism where the image no longer points to any object exterior to itself but merely to another image, and where imagination is no longer the expression of an authentic individual, but of capitalism endlessly repeating itself in the images of the spectacle, the endless repetition of the same.

In a certain sense, we see here a repetition of the author's

criticism of Sartre and Husserl whose excessive magnification of the constituting power of self consciousness leads to the disappearance of the object. In postmodernism, of course, it is not the subject that is the dominating power but the system of images itself (capitalism). All externality vanishes in the repetition of the image. There can be nothing outside this presentation. But the whole point of imagination is that it allows us to transcend what is given. It gives us a possibility of opening out to 'an answerability to the other which cannot be dispelled in our civilisation of the image'. The Other is conceived as that which is unheard in our own tradition, and which arrives as the possibility of the future (Vattimo); it is conceived as another subject, which cannot be reduced to my knowledge of it but which enters my symbolic universe as something excessive, interruptive (Kristeva), or which is a plurality of narratives that we must respond to from a sense of justice (Lyotard).

Undoubtedly the last chapters of this book are the most difficult. Kearney sees in imagination a possibility of utopian politics that is being denied in late capitalism and thinks that alterity will somehow prevent authentic imagination from being sucked into the 'culture industry'. But what has alterity to do with imagination? Is not imagination just as much damaged by alterity, though in a completely different way, as it is by mass culture? For imagination always starts with the fundamental priority of the self, its positing itself upon the earth. This is why in Kant imagination is the essence of subjectivity, the 'self activity of the subject'. Is not the relation to the Other, as Levinas has argued, one of passivity and not intentionality? If the Other is mediated by the image that I have of it, then it ceases to be other at all, it is merely *other for me*. The premise that 'imagination lies at the heart of our existence' might itself still be dependent on the centrality of subjectivity that an 'ethics of alterity' calls into question.

William Large

NATIONAL SCIENTISM

Pierre Duhem, *German Science*, trans. John Lyon, La Salle, Illinois, Open Court, 1991. xxv + 136pp., \$36.95 hb, \$17.95 pb, 0 8126 9123 7 hb, 0 8126 9124 5 pb.

John Lyon has translated a popular lecture series and two short articles by Pierre Duhem, dating from 1915 and 1916. Their immediate effect is disturbing. We seem to find this most sagacious of French *savants* voluntarily lending his wit, erudition and intellect to blatant propaganda, attacking the character of 'the German' and exhorting his young countrymen not only to defend the soil of France from the incursions of the *Boches*, but also to commit themselves to a cultural struggle to preserve the Spirit of French Science and Historiography, against the German Mind.

The translator and Stanley Jaki (who provides an introduction) both acknowledge the embarrassing appearance of these pieces, and seek to excuse them by drawing attention to Duhem's exposition of German 'virtues', which, indeed, seems to raise him above the level of a mere war-time propagandist. He concludes his public lecture series in 1915 with a call to a 'true science' beyond nationalism, but, whatever Duhem's intentions may have been, one suspects that his audience will have understood this 'true science' to be rather closer to 'French' science, with its particular virtue of 'good sense', than to the relentless obedience to dubious axioms menacing from the Fatherland next door.

Duhem's threefold career placed him in the first rank as a

theoretical physicist, a philosopher of science, and an historian of ideas. His fundamental work in thermodynamics earned him the special distinction of election as one of the first six 'non-resident members' of the Academy of Sciences. The monumental scholarship of his *Système du Monde* established the importance of the mediaeval and Renaissance precursors of the 'scientific revolution', whose very existence had become obscured by that revolution's rewriting of history. But he is most widely known nowadays for his book *The Aim and Structure of Physical Theory*. Significantly this was originally published in 1906, in a Catholic magazine, suggesting that its roots, like those of the *Système du Monde* itself, lay in the Galileo affair. Some people see in this work an anticipation of Popper and Lakatos, though its subtleties are often quoted against Popper. What emerges in Duhem's work is an anti-realist view of scientific theory, which leaves room for unabashed realism in theology.

In one of the most famous passages of *The Aim and Structure of Physical Theory*, Duhem discusses characteristically different approaches to theory formation in France and Britain. For Duhem, the 'French spirit' in science aims at the systematic organisation of experience within an hierarchical theoretical structure. The theoretical elegance and economy to which 'French science' aspires is exemplified in the discipline which Duhem made his own, namely thermodynamics. On the other hand British scientists range far and wide with empirical eclecticism and show a

fascination with *ad hoc* 'mechanical models'. Kelvin exemplified this trend by filling the whole of space with extraordinary Victorian machinery in an attempt to understand the properties of 'the Aether'. According to Duhem, the British scientific mind is 'broad and shallow', while the French is 'narrow and deep'. The two traditions reflect their 'founding fathers' – Bacon on the one hand and Descartes on the other.

Generally speaking readers of *The Aim and Structure of Physical Theory* have seen Duhem's comments about British and French science not as quasi-racist remarks about innate national character but as materials for a sociology of scientific culture. *German Science* is a later, longer and more polemical discussion in which Duhem's comments about nationalism in science, written under conditions of war, take on a more sinister character.

The key philosophical point goes back to Aristotle's *Posterior Analytics*: if 'demonstration' consists in deducing theorems from axioms, then the first principles of a science must be *indemonstrable*. The logical mechanisms which guarantee the validity of deduction cannot guarantee the truth of the premises. According to Duhem, the quest for a 'demonstration' of first principles leads to scepticism, because first principles can be known to be true only by the 'spirit of intuition', informed by 'good sense'.

It is here that Duhem injects his national stereotypes. 'German Science' exalts meticulous care in *deduction* and in minute experimental detail. The great strength of 'French Science' on the other hand is its 'Good Sense' which alone can ensure that the axioms in any system are to be relied upon. Without the guidance of the 'French Spirit', the huge rock-crushing tomes of 'the German' embody monstrous and impenetrable towers of theorems, obscure and absurd metaphysical schemes, and wildly speculative theories of history. The war for the soil of France is also a war to preserve French good sense from a German cultural steam-roller.

The language in which Duhem casts his descriptions of the different national characters of French, British and German science focuses upon the 'mental powers' of the characteristic citizen, rather than social and cultural issues. We could have had a discussion of the differences between each country's mythic heroes, their education systems, and their routes to power, wealth or status. Instead we are offered a theory about innate psychological tendencies: over-development of certain powers of the mind leads to stunted growth elsewhere. Thus the *mathematical mind* of 'the Germans' makes them supreme in developing chains of deduction, but they typically lack 'good sense' in evaluating their premises. Conversely, the British – gifted with superb 'intuition' – suffer from lack of tenacity and thoroughness. Since these tendencies are the result of the different mental muscular development of each nation, Duhem seems to be presenting a quasi-genetic theory of national cognitive types. He also suggests that these 'differences' may be as much matters of will as of cognition, in which case they arise from moral differences between peoples.

To be sure he exempts the very great: Newton shows no sign of 'Englishness'; nor are Gauss and Helmholtz typically 'German'. Such as these have 'fully rounded' intellects. It is among the scientists of second rank – the 'mediocracy' – that the differences in national character are supposedly most evident. This leads to the conclusion that national differences are largely a matter of common intellectual *deficiencies* shared by the majority of each nation. It follows that the fully rounded abilities of those who transcend national stereotypes can be approached on the large scale only by *international* cooperation in science. Thus rather than damn 'German Science' outright, Duhem exhorts his countrymen to strengthen their science by drawing upon the German tireless and meticulous attention to detail, offering in return the

'good sense' of France to act as a guide to the overall direction of their efforts – 'Germans on tap, not on top,' to borrow Churchill's remark about keeping scientists in their place.

Striking though Duhem's observations are of cultural divergences in scientific education and scientific practice, his apparent attempt to root these in innate differences of national character has sinister consequences. Presumably once a 'German' always a 'German', even if one is transplanted to France or England. Such ideas found their dreadful apotheosis in the Nazi condemnation of 'Jewish Physics'. The 'Jewish Spirit' in physics, they declared, was responsible for 'mathematical mysticism' while true 'Aryan' or 'German' physics had a practical, applied and even *völkisch* character. There does indeed seem to be evidence that in the 1930s in Germany, a far higher proportion of academics with Jewish roots were attracted to mathematical physics than to engineering. At the University of Göttingen, the Nazis' pursuit of 'Aryanisation' left the Department of Engineering unscathed but completely wiped out the Department of Theoretical Physics. But these differences in the composition of academic departments are attributable to cultural factors. Once such differences are interpreted 'genetically', then questioning the value of a scientific tradition slides all too easily into a racist attack. Duhem's way of interpreting the cultural differences he observed starts out on this slippery slope.

There are many striking ironies in these essays. Duhem's antipathy to mechanical models, such as Kelvin used to interpret Maxwell's electrodynamics, leads him to reject the latter. On the other hand Hertz's assertion that Maxwell's theory is simply Maxwell's equations, which ought to have satisfied Duhem, is denounced as an example of the 'German spirit' at its worst. Duhem goes on to attack Riemann's geometry, and Einstein's special theory of relativity, as typical 'Germanic' excesses, taking the consequences of arbitrary postulates to absurd lengths in defiance of 'good sense'. Ironically Duhem's attacks coincided with the publication of Einstein's General Theory of Relativity, which combined both of these 'absurdities' in a radically new theory of gravitation. The theory was triumphantly vindicated by a British astronomical expedition the year after the First World War ended, and Einstein was hailed across the world for remaking the 'first principles' of physics. By then Duhem himself was dead, so he did not have to live through the total rout of his prejudices, and Einstein himself put a different complexion on the Duhemian labelling of national stereotypes in science: 'If my theory is vindicated, the Germans will call me a Great German; the Swiss will call me a Great Swiss; and the French will call me a Citizen of the World. If my theory is refuted, the French will call me a Swiss; the Swiss will call me a German; and the Germans will call me a Jew.'

One senses in these writings that Duhem was engaged in a deep inner struggle. His belief that the culture of high science transcends national boundaries wrestled with his observations about real differences in the scientific traditions and cultures of different nations. His interpretation of the latter seems to have been refracted by deep prejudices. He should have been aware of the dangers. His attack on 'Theories of History' indicates that he understood the subtlety and finesse necessary to the historian's art, but did not apply what he knew to his own ideas about nationality in science. We should recognise that he was writing and speaking in a context of great social and psychological stress. His audience was looking to him to bolster their national pride and dehumanise the enemy, and, though there are many touches which remind us that this was one of the greatest and most subtle scholars of his time, his audience will not have been disappointed.

Jonathan Powers

FEELING STRANGE

Slavoj Žižek, *Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan through Popular Culture*, Massachusetts, MIT Press, 1991. 188pp., £14.95 hb, 0 262 2403 9.

Julia Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves*, Hemel Hempstead, Harvester, 1991. 230pp., £25.00 hb, 0 7450 0743 0.

The debate over the human subject, and its relation to contemporary civilisation, is crucial to these books by Žižek and Kristeva. In recent decades, the breakdown of communal particularity into a global network of abstract universality has been well documented. Modernity has ushered in a series of cultural, technological and economic developments, including global economic mechanisms, social and linguistic homogenization by means of mass media industries, and the creation of nuclear weaponry. The political and ideological impact of these upheavals upon the self and self-identity is an unavoidable aspect of our contemporary experience. Yet social commentators remain divided over the impact of universalisation. For neoconservative cultural critics, it is fatal. For others, the consequences are more ambivalent. Modern culture may serve to promote a deepening of social democracy; or, alternatively, it may produce a new climate for totalitarian temptation.

What are the possibilities for the self in the face of the new social institutions of modernity? The dominant answer to this in contemporary theory is well known. 'Poststructuralism', and the Derridean enterprise of deconstruction, happily see self-identity and self-presence as split or deferred by the trace of the text. On this view, the subject vanishes, the self being always already determined by the inter-textual network. Alternatively, recent developments in Continental social theory have sought to reassess the status of the subject. Largely influenced by psychoanalysis, and specifically Lacan's 'return to Freud', theorists associated with this standpoint are out to recover aspects of the self which are currently submerged in the repressive medium of universal integration.

It is this latter position which is boldly advanced, and defended, in Žižek's *Looking Awry*. Žižek is perhaps best known in English-speaking countries for his writings on ideology and on recent political developments in Eastern Europe. Perhaps some-

what mis-titled as an introduction to the thought of Lacan, *Looking Awry* moves at a very high theoretical level indeed – tackling issues from contemporary deformations of popular culture, to the theoretical limits of poststructuralism and deconstruction, through to the multitude of fantasy structures which underpin modern bureaucracy and democracy. The first sections of the book – which link Lacanian theory with popular culture – offer many interesting insights, ranging from Shakespeare through Alfred Hitchcock to the cult film *Robocop*. Žižek is able to demonstrate fairly easily that Lacanian theory need not result in endless abstractions, but rather offers a useful theoretical map for interpreting aspects of modern culture. Yet Žižek's apparent ease in linking cultural formations to Lacanian categories is, as many commentators have argued, somewhat worrying. To read that the Marx Brothers' famous lines on identity ('You remind me of Emmanuel Ravelli.' 'But I am Emmanuel Ravelli!' 'No wonder, then, that you resemble him so much!') is a play on the structuring power of the Symbolic Order – this is certainly less than enlightening.

Žižek is on stronger ground, I think, in the later sections of the book – 'Fantasy, Bureaucracy, Democracy', each of which is original and provocative. Žižek's fundamental thesis is that there is a 'fundamental antagonism' at the heart of human subjectivity, registered in Lacanian terms as 'lack', which is filled out by ideological relations through the medium of fantasy. On this view, ideological beliefs of whatever tendency are simply fantasy attempts to cover over the empty space of the self. Ideology, in short, provides an idealised vision of a life and a society which in reality cannot exist – what Žižek calls the fundamental split between the Symbolic and the Real. Problems of racism and nationalism provide something of a baseline here. The racist hatred of the Other, Žižek argues, connects directly to our own fundamental antagonism and failed sense of selfhood. Racist ideologies engage the passions and desires of human beings since they are extremely powerful (and socially instituted) ways of avoiding that painful 'lack' buried deep within the self. Instead, pain is projected on to something that is perceived as strange and other.

It is surely not hard to see that there is something wrong with Žižek's argument. The key problem with Žižek's use of the immutable category of 'antagonism', as a measure of cultural domination, is that it conceals the very contradictions it seeks to explain. Whether one is in the grip of male chauvinist culture, full-blooded nationalism, ecological protest, or simply watching Jonathan Ross, these are for Žižek all pieces of ideological fantasy aimed at soothing the sour taste of our 'fundamental antagonism'. In short, Žižek's case results in a critique of the subject that is cast so widely as to be fruitless for social and political analysis.

This criticism cannot be as easily levelled at Kristeva's *Strangers To Ourselves* – winner of the Prix Henri Hertz for 1989. In an altogether more solid and elegant account of the links between subjectivity and heteronomy, Kristeva examines the progressive estrangement from self and being in our increasingly globalized world. Tracing the history of the notion of the 'stranger', Kristeva embarks on a journey from the Bible, through the literature of the Middle Ages, to the political philosophy of Hobbes and Montesquieu. Perhaps not surprisingly for a practising psychoanalyst, Kristeva concludes her journey into otherness with Freud. The history of the concept of 'foreignness,' she argues, can be seen as a progressive shift from an anxiety located in the Other (God, the State, culture) to a strangeness in ourselves. In the current global system of late modernity, she contends, we



are all subject to an 'uncanny strangeness' (Freud). For this radical strangeness to be accepted and tempered, a 'new community bond' is required. From this angle, Kristeva is less concerned to make submissions to the European Community (though she has interesting things to say about a united Europe) than to redefine culture, its discontents and its limits. She argues that our culture does contain traces of social practices and memories which could be employed to support the acceptance of individual particularities and differences. The project for multinational society, then, is to develop post-traditional forms of self-identity, emotional experience and new gender roles. The aim of all this: to encourage human beings to recognise themselves as foreigners.

It would, of course, be idle at this stage to pretend to understand the precise implications of Kristeva's work for any image of collective autonomy or of immanent utopian possibilities. But what I do find disturbing about Kristeva's analysis – and similarly (perhaps more so) with Žižek – is a tendency to rationalise the real,

the social, and existing political conditions. For there seems to be an implicit consensus between Kristeva and Žižek that the autonomy of the self (and hence the social) is best advanced through an internal resignation to lack, absence and nothingness. We are called upon to do nothing, other than accept. Beyond this rhetoric, however, there lies an important question: what kind of societal restructuring is possible without the activity and praxis of human beings? Lost in their musings on 'lack' and 'otherness', Žižek and Kristeva have little to say on this score. Yet if it is at all possible to develop post-traditional forms of identity and communal participation, then surely a political project for individual and collective autonomy demands sustained attention to critical social theory. This is not to suggest that strangeness and otherness are not prime examples of the lived conditions of late capitalism, but it is to claim that political participation and activity is vital for any rethinking of the self in social and political theory.

Anthony Elliott

WOMEN AT THE END OF HISTORY?

Anne Phillips, *Engendering Democracy*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 1991. 183pp., £35 hb, £9.95 pb, 0 7456 0648 2 hb, 0 7456 0649 0 pb.

Anne Phillips brings a long commitment to the women's movement into dialogue with democratic theory. In this respect her writing treads a judicious course through the public and the private, particularism and universalism, participatory and representative democracy, while developing a critique of contemporary feminism and mainstream democratic theory. Here her contribution resembles recent attempts by John Keane and David Held to reconstruct democratic theory in the face of the collapse of scientific socialism and the misery of free market capitalism. Contemporary forms of liberal democracy are in need of a dual process of reform, where public life is revitalised through the democratic inclusion of groups other than middle-class white males, and a more participatory civil society.

At the end of her essay, Phillips suggests that there have been two major changes in contemporary social conditions: the extension of liberal democratic practices across the globe and the fragmentation of social identities. The problem with traditional liberal democracy is that it assumes the consent of the male propertied subject, and has sought to defend an impoverished notion of political participation. The women's movement, on the other hand, resounds with examples of collective attempts to create the intellectual space to re-define interests and criticise male dominance. Phillips argues for the value of getting more women into representative democracy, as in the Nordic countries, and against civic republicanism and feminist forms of radical difference. Civic republicanism and difference feminism seem to be a mirror image of one another. In the republican tradition the emphasis is placed upon sacrificing one's own specific interests for the interests of the community as a whole. As Iris Marion Young has pointed out, this effectively silences any discussion of women's particular experience through the acceptance of a male-dominated universalism. Phillips, on the other hand, wisely occupies an intermediate position. For if one accepts, as difference feminism seems to imply, that women can only speak as women, this unintentionally reinforces asymmetrical relations between men and women. This would, Phillips suggests, begin to lose sight of the principle of equality that should guide our political practice. While Phillips is, not surprisingly, pessimistic

concerning the possibility of a society where gendered differences disappear, she at least wants to keep this utopian hope open. This is achieved through the practice of a form of empathetic self-detachment, where we reflexively seek to transcend our own position and imaginatively attempt to capture an experience that is radically different from our own.



Despite Phillips's attempts to re-draw the boundaries between representative and participatory democracy, the precise relations between the two remain vague. In some of the best sections of this clearly-written account, Phillips alerts her readers to some of the limitations of direct forms of participation. For example, she argues that the fact that small groups often dominate more direct forms of democracy means that we should consider the addition of more formal structures of participation such as secret ballots. But when she comes to reflect upon what the specific relation between different types of democratic participation should be, she answers that it is a matter that ought to be left to politics. In this respect she does not consider the alternative democratic forums that would allow for deeper forms of control over a wide range of institutions. It is also disappointing that Phillips pays only scant attention to the material conditions of late capitalism, which she discussed in her earlier work *Hidden Hands* (1983). Important social processes that can be connected with the emergence of a post-industrial economy and the globalisation of political and cultural institutions never properly occupy the intellectual foreground. But *Engendering Democracy* deserves to be read widely, not least for its argument that the political marginalisation of most women provides reason enough for the continuation of history.

Nick Stevenson

MOSCOW GOLD

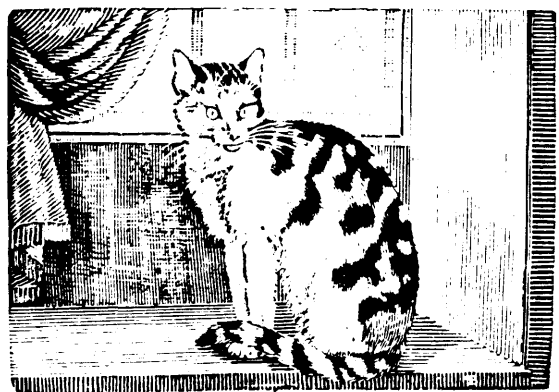
David Bakhurst, *Revolution and Consciousness in Soviet Philosophy*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1991. xi + 292pp., £27.50 hb, 0 521 38534 2, £9.95 pb, 0 521 40710 9.

Pre-*glasnost* Soviet philosophy has long been subject to derision and caricature on the part of Western Sovietologists and Slavacists, treated as an ideological mouthpiece of the CPSU and not worthy of serious academic study. It is this view that David Bakhurst sets out to challenge. If many Soviet philosophers were engaged in the ritual legitimization of 'axiomatic' Marxist-Leninist principles, Bakhurst argues that there also existed a tradition of critical thought which criticised the shortcomings of 'really existing socialism' while remaining faithful to the radically democratic and humanistic promise of Marx's own intellectual vision.

Bakhurst undertakes this rescue operation through a kind of 'depth archaeology' of a number of obscure or forgotten Soviet philosophical debates, mainly dating from the 1920s. One crucial dispute concerned the status of philosophical knowledge and its relationship to science. While the 'Deborinites' (Hegelian-Menshevik followers of Deborin) argued for the integrity of philosophical inquiry, the centrality of dialectical analysis, and the irreducibility of thought to matter in motion, the 'Mechanists' toed an essentially positivist line and believed that speculative philosophy should be liquidated and replaced with the empirical methods of the physical sciences. After the Deborinites temporarily gained the upper hand in the late 1920s, both trends were swept away by the 'Bolshevizers', who insisted that philosophy be subordinated to political considerations, a harbinger of the Stalinisation of Soviet intellectual life that was shortly to come. At about the same time, Lev Vygotsky founded a 'cultural-historical' school of social psychology that attempted to overcome the epistemological aporias of both the Mechanists and the Deborinites. Vygotsky's distinctive contribution to Soviet philosophy, Bakhurst asserts, was to develop a *social* theory of thought and language which departed significantly from both the Cartesian and Kantian traditions, and which in many respects anticipated the later Wittgenstein. If the acquisition of higher mental processes was the product of our intersubjective relation with others in particular social contexts, Vygotsky argued, then any theory of knowledge which was premised on a conception of 'pure thought' divorced from an independently-existing reality was a *non-sequitur*.

Bakhurst makes a detour at this point, backtracking to Lenin's 1909 *Materialism and Empiriocriticism*. This polemic was aimed at the renegade Bolshevik A. A. Bogdanov and a number of other Russian Marxists who had fallen under the spell of the Austrian philosopher and physicist Ernst Mach. Bakhurst takes Lenin's philosophical excursions seriously, suggesting that despite his dogmatism Lenin was essentially correct to identify and challenge the nascent idealism of empiriocriticism on both theoretical and political grounds. However, he also argues that Lenin's own position was confused and self-contradictory, because he vacillated between a direct or 'radical' realism on the one hand and an essentially conservative realism (one that relied on a rigid mind/world dualism) on the other. The initial promise of this radical realism only came to fruition much later in the work of Evald Ilyenkov (1924–1979). In Bakhurst's opinion, Ilyenkov represents the pinnacle of Soviet philosophy, and he devotes the bulk of this study to an analysis of what he takes to be his three main contributions: first, he developed a sophisticated dialectical method based on his reading of Marx's *Capital*, stressing the particularity of the 'concrete object' and resisting codification into 'laws' on

the *diamat* model. Secondly, and perhaps most important, Ilyenkov attempted to tackle the problem of the ontological status of ideal entities within a materialist philosophy. He wanted to combat the methodological solipsism of any theory (empiricism, Kantianism, etc.) which posited an absolute gulf between subject and object, arguing that the 'ideal' was not coterminous with consciousness but located in the external world. Following the early Marx, Ilyenkov asserted that by acting on the world we objectify or 'humanize' it, give it shape and meaning. Because 'our forms of thought are built into objective reality itself (what he termed 'humanity's spiritual culture'), this reality could become a direct object of knowledge. This premise helps explain the concept of 'radical realism', which bears an interesting affinity to realist philosophies of science developed in the West by Bhaskar and others. Thirdly, Ilyenkov's epistemological stance led him to reject crude materialism (a legacy of the Mechanists) and to argue



in favour of the social constitution of human thought and activity, citing Vygotsky's work in the 1920s as a major source of inspiration. Accordingly, Ilyenkov denounced widespread Soviet attempts to describe human thought and action in terms borrowed from genetics or cybernetics, and he remained faithful to Marx's philosophical anthropology – that is, to a conception of the creative and self-actualizing individual. By implying that human potentiality could not be fully realised within the existing institutional arrangements of the Soviet state, Ilyenkov's philosophy was (however obliquely) fused with an emancipatory politics. It comes as no surprise that Ilyenkov was subject to considerable vilification by officialdom. Yet Bakhurst avoids the hero-worship that often colours the examination of theoretical dissidents in the USSR, and he is forthcoming about the flawed and incomplete nature of Ilyenkov's project. Indeed, he is forced to reconstruct Ilyenkov's position at crucial points in his discussion, either because Ilyenkov himself never developed an adequate response to certain objections voiced by Soviet critics, or because it would have been politically dangerous to do so under conditions of censorship and repression.

My only reservation is that Bakhurst might have done more to integrate the historical chronicle of Soviet philosophy with the material on Ilyenkov. But *Consciousness and Revolution* is an original and provocative study, written with admirable clarity and rigour. By bringing Ilyenkov in particular and Soviet philosophy in general to a wider audience without the distorting influence of cold war clichés and platitudes, Bakhurst has managed to salvage a vital tradition of critical Marxist thought from the dust-bin of history.

Michael Gardiner

PERCEPTIONS

Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Texts and Dialogues*, edited by Hugh J. Silverman and James Barry, Jr., Atlantic Highlands and London, Humanities Press, 1992. 207pp., \$45 hb, 0 391 03702 1.

Who was the most important French philosopher of the twentieth century? It is a foolish question, of course; but this book starts by offering an interesting answer: Maurice Merleau-Ponty. His writings were unified by a single theme, which he formulated when he was a student in the early 1930s: the nature of perception, and the experience of the body. In perception, as Merleau-Ponty conceived it, we are always already caught in a net of meanings constituted by the 'system of self, things and others'. Thus perceiving the world comes before either having sensations or making judgements, even though 'classical thought' has persistently denied it.

But 'refutations are not very interesting', as Merleau-Ponty put it in an interview translated here; and he himself was the least negative of philosophers. He offered grateful accounts of what was to be learned from experimental psychology, marxism, linguistics, fiction and painting; and above all, from Husserl, with his project for 'an archaeology of consciousness'. He also allied himself with Sartre, praising the early studies of the imagination, as well as *Being and Nothingness*, by which his own *Phenomenology of Perception* was unjustly overshadowed.

Merleau-Ponty's concept of perception provided a platform not only for criticising the prejudices of 'classical' thought, but also for a vast range of writings on politics (from an unaligned 'revolutionary socialist' standpoint), literature, and art. One of their main features is self-effacing generosity, towards both his readers and his subject matter. This absolute lack of conceit prevented him from becoming a celebrity. It also gives his work a certain personal elusiveness, which *Texts and Dialogues* does a lot to remedy. For it is not a collection of extracts from his best-known works, but a selection of occasional pieces, many of them almost completely unknown, and unavailable even in French. It includes his earliest outlines of his intellectual plans, an interview, transcripts of talks, reviews, and working notes, full of superb remarks about almost everything, but above all about the tasks of philosophy, which Merleau-Ponty took with a seriousness that has now gone right out of style. 'Philosophy rebels against the positivism of life', as he told readers of his column in a popular newspaper; at a conference with some analytic philosophers, he challenged a very obtuse Gilbert Ryle with the well-aimed question 'Is correctness the cardinal virtue of thinking?' In an interview, he insists that philosophy is a matter of 'an attentive yet very simple gaze', and that 'when a philosopher works, there is no thought of serving others, and even less of his or her work'. Only others 'talk about the philosopher's ideas'. And a reconstructed lecture on Husserl's concept of nature, printed as an appendix, provides a brilliant, brief explanation of his paradoxical but vital doctrine that 'the most singular, the most carnal, is the most universal'.

Although *Texts and Dialogues* may look like a dispensable assemblage of ephemera, it effectively offers us far, far more. It functions, in fact, like an ideal biography – that is to say, biography without the biographer. It gives us a sense of Merleau-Ponty in his 'carnal singularity'; and it makes you realise how desperately sad it is that in 1961, when he was in his early fifties, and full of plans and hopes, he died.

Jonathan Rée

REVOLUTIONS

Ernesto Laclau, *New Reflections on The Revolution of Our Time*, London, Verso, 1991. xvi + 263pp., £34.96 hb, £11.95 pb, 0 86091 202 7 hb, 0 86091 919 6 pb.

The obvious question about this book is: Which 'revolution' is being referred to? Apparently, it is the post-structuralist one – the one that proclaimed the limits of reason, the radical diversity of values, and the impossibility of deliberate revolutionary transition.

Some of the texts collected here, including a *New Left Review* interview, could serve as an introduction to Laclau's intellectual development. In a slightly stilted exchange of letters with a South African student, for example, Laclau explains that workers' struggles are no longer between social classes, so that new, more explicitly political democratic demands have to be admitted, without the universalising, hegemonic aims of the old marxist emancipatory programme.

But the book's main interest is a claim that the post-marxist 'revolution' provides the best way to deal with those other, recent revolutions, post-1989. Laclau contends that only post-marxism identifies the conceptual territory now needed: between the unitary 'social' imposed by communist utopias and its opposite, the 'individual' of the Western market, now uncritically embraced by the former communist countries. This view is set out in a new essay, outlining a possible social-democratic transformation, radically liberated from Enlightenment rationality. As Laclau sees it, the latter re-instituted the medieval aspiration for seamless unity in a grandiose Hegelian-Marxist resolution of history. By contrast, he contends, true democracy would start from the negation of structure and 'spatial' order as the rationalist programme tried to construct it. The traditional 'subject' of a socialist order belongs to that rationalist heritage. For Laclau, however, the subject is only an unrealisable 'myth' of subjective identity sought by political actors 'because of dislocations in the structure'.

Yet, democracy and a sort of revolution are still conceivable: precisely in the dislocation, which post-modernism has often stressed. Laclau believes that 'our age – the age of democratic revolution' – is exploring the possibility of historical change without a representation of any ultimate closure. Today, the true meaning of democracy is 'the ultimate impossibility of all representation' and 'the very placing in question of the notion of ground'.

It is not new to accuse Laclau of posing grand but specious alternatives. In going back to Plato and Aristotle, he offers many hostages to that criticism. A striking case is his central condemnation of 'spatialization'. He means by that the 'elimination of temporality' from an event. This notion appears, for example, in his critique of traditional marxism's pursuit of 'fullness', and in his stipulation that 'politics only exists insofar as the spatial eludes us'. It underpins his ideas that dislocation of structure is the source of change, and that an unstable self-identification is the perpetual pre-condition of freedom. Finally, 'spatiality', as a misplaced desire to reach a self-contained totality, frequently appears as a critical expression: Hegelian-Marxism, for example, is a 'grandiose scheme of pure spatiality'.

Naturally, if ideas of structure have been 'spatial' in this sense, then temporality, change and freedom will hardly square with them. But one does wonder who in fact has thought like that about structure – apart from Pythagorean mystics, Spinoza (at times) and the more extreme kind of structuralist. And who, other than

a light-headed *post*-structuralist, will feel that temporality, historical change, or freedom can be regained simply by *negating* structure? Rather, structures existing *within* the passage of time appear to be an essential (though far from fixed) constituent of our understanding of change, of ourselves, and of freedom. The democratic revolution is by no means guaranteed, therefore, by assiduous avoidance of 'spatial' structure and of determinate subjects in historical change.

Noel Parker

SODS

Pierre Klossowski, *Sade My Neighbour*, trans. Alphonso Lingis, Evanston, Northwestern University Press, 1991. \$24.95 hb, \$9.95 pb, 0 8101 0957 3 hb, 0 8101 0958 1 pb.

Born in 1905, Pierre Klossowski is one of those strange figures who, without ever becoming truly celebrated in their own right, exercise an immense but almost occult influence on contemporaries and a younger generation. Barthes, Foucault, Lacan and the writers of the *Tel Quel* group were all influenced by him, and it is probable that the notion of the simulacrum that has recently been given currency by Baudrillard originates in his work. Translator, critic, philosopher, theologian, novelist and artist (he has never exhibited in Britain), he is probably best known for his erotica and is often discussed in the same breath as Bataille, though he himself sees his writings as belonging to a mystical, gnostic tradition. His work – in all media and genres – is difficult, dense and austere beautiful.

Sade My Neighbour, now translated for the first time in a version which captures Klossowski's rather Latinate French, is something of a classic. First published in 1947, and then revised and expanded in 1967, it is, along with Blanchot's *Sade et Lautréamont*, one of the first attempts at a serious reading of Sade and it was made at a time when censorship ensured that his works were obtainable only with difficulty. If Sade has since become part of a recognisable canon in France, it is thanks in no small part to Klossowski. At a time when the renewed availability of the Grove edition of Sade in British bookshops is a cause for controversy, it is salutary to look again at this rigorous study.

As Klossowski's translator notes, to take Sade seriously is to think the unthinkable. Taking Sade seriously as a philosopher and not simply as a pornographer – though he is certainly that too – means looking at the darker side of the Enlightenment. The vision of nature in perpetual motion which dethrones god in La Mettrie or d'Holbach is transformed into one which announces, not the arrival of a happier era for humanity, but a utopia of evil and the beginnings of a cosmic tragedy. For Klossowski, Sade prefigures Nietzsche and the dichotomy between the sufferings of the innocent, and a self-consciousness willing to suffer its guilt because it is only by paying that price that it can feel itself existing. Nature, 'destructive of her own works', becomes an argument for the insignificance of murder. According to Sade, Nature destroys in order to recover her own power. In the face of nature, the libertine constructs the thesis of transgression: a testimony of atheism which can find no equilibrium even in the evil it commits, and which therefore generates further acts of transgression unto eternity. Sodomy becomes the privileged act: a challenge to the self-perpetuation of nature and, especially in its heterosexual mode, a grotesque simulacrum of the act of generation. To read Sade is to enter a universe of self-perpetuating crime. To add to

its perversity, that universe and its actors are described in the pure, well-made language of classicism. Sade's pervers are not in the grip of some uncontrollable passion. Their actions are rational, their mood apathetic; their creed one of reason and their language that of any Enlightenment *philosophe*. It is, perhaps, the combination of rationality and transgression that makes Sade so unthinkable. Can Klossowski be taken as seriously as he takes Sade?

David Macey

FOUCAULT

Timothy J. Armstrong (trans.), *Michel Foucault, Philosopher*, London, Harvester/Wheatsheaf, 1991. xvi + 351pp., £12.99 pb, 0 7450 0885 2.

This book is a collection of critical essays on Michel Foucault, written for an international colloquium held in Paris in January 1988. Many of the contributors (such as Gilles Deleuze and Hubert Dreyfus) are already well known for their writings on Foucault. It is a wide-ranging collection, divided into five sections: Michel Foucault in the History of Philosophy; Style and Discourse; Power and Government; Ethics and the Subject; Rationalities and Histories.

Some of the contributions to the volume explore familiar themes. Etienne Balibar, for example, explores the question of nominalism in Foucault and Marx. Roberto Machado discusses the relation between epistemology and Foucault's project of 'archaeology', and Jacques-Alain Miller the relation between Foucault's work and psychoanalysis. For me, however, the most interesting parts of the book were those which raised questions about Foucault's relation to philosophy, and about what is sometimes seen as the 'ethical turn' in his last writings.

In his 'genealogical' work, notably on sexuality, Foucault put forward the idea of power as productive, and of power relations as 'dispersed' and lacking any source or centre. To some critics, it has appeared that this concept of power left little room for resistance, or for any politics other than one of anarchic 'spontaneity'. In his last books, however, on the uses of pleasure and the care of the self in antiquity, he described a notion of the 'care of the self', of an 'art' and 'aesthetics' of living, which seems to be premised on a notion of freedom. Whilst always rejecting the idea that such an ethic could be a 'model' for ourselves, he was nevertheless plainly attracted to it, and believed that a study of the very different practices and conceptions of self in antiquity could open up an important space for ethical questioning which tended to be closed by contemporary Western views of self and morality. In one of the last interviews before his death, Foucault himself argued that his concept of 'power' had never implied that human beings had no freedom, but only that power and freedom were mutually dependent.

The relation between power and freedom in Foucault's work, and the conception of an 'aesthetics' of living, seem likely to be central questions for Foucauldian criticism, and some of the contributions to this book are sharply polarised in their views. Rainer Rochlitz argues that the transition from questions about the apparatus of sexuality and disciplines of the body to questions about the aesthetic relationship to self is by no means obvious, and that the importance attached to 'biopower' seems to have been dispersed in Foucault's later work. Pierre Hadot not only disagrees with Foucault's interpretation of the Stoics, but argues that

there is a danger that Foucault is advocating a purely aesthetic cultivation of the self, a late 20th century version of dandyism. James Bernauer, on the other hand, argues that Foucault's last writings on the self do not constitute a 'break' and that these writings are best understood as a continuation of the last sections of *La Volonté de Savoir*. And, far from seeing Foucault as proposing an aesthetics of existence which is remote from politics, Bernauer argues that human souls/selves have been fashioned in a way which mirrors contemporary political landscapes, and that Foucault's proposal for a different ethical way of being a subject is intimately connected to our understanding of these landscapes, and to any hopes we might have of changing them. The papers in the book, along with Foucault's own last writings and interviews, provide a rich source for these debates.

The other interesting aspect of the book is indicated in the title itself, *Michel Foucault, Philosopher*. In his paper, François Wahl points out that Foucault did not tackle the question of the status of philosophical discourse 'head on', and at times resisted being seen as 'a philosopher'. Nevertheless, particularly in his last writings, he had much to say about the role of philosophy in resisting forms of domination. Many of his remarks were brief, sometimes enigmatic, usually inconclusive. But the project of thinking through the implications of Foucault's work for the nature and status of philosophy itself seems likely to be of continuing interest, and it is one for which this book will provide a great deal of interesting material.

Jean Grimshaw

G. W. F. Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, edited by Allen Wood, translated by H. B. Nisbet, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1991. lli + 514pp., £30 hb, £9.95 pb, 0 521 34438 7 hb, 0 521 34888 9 pb.

The *Philosophy of Right* was Hegel's last major published work. In it he attempted to synthesize the natural law tradition, ethical theory, political theory, and the sociology of civil society (which he was among the first to theorise as a distinct sphere). It is especially noteworthy that Hegel insisted that the modern state cannot be understood without an account of the ethical disposition of the citizens and without taking full account of the market economy.

The previous translation, by T. M. Knox, was always well regarded; however, it was completed in 1942, and after half a century this new version taking full account of modern scholarship is very welcome. It forms part of Cambridge's monumental series of texts from the history of political thought, with their distinctive blue and red covers.

The book first appeared in January 1821 under a cumbersome double title: *Natural Law and Political Science in Outline: For Use with his Lectures*, by Hegel; and *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, by Hegel. The first title reflects the fact that German professors of the time were expected to produce compendia of their lectures to assist students. Perhaps Hegel's preferred title was the second; at all events this is how it is given in later editions and in the new English translation under review.

However, given the fact that the book was intended for use with Hegel's lectures, additions culled from his students' lecture notes were incorporated into the text posthumously by his pupil Eduard Gans for his 1833 edition, and were reproduced in many later editions. As Nisbet, the present translator, points out, these additions have to be treated with caution,

but he gives them here because of their traditional associations with the text. While Knox relegated them to the back, this edition puts them into the text in small print. Given that Hegel's own 'Remarks' to his numbered paragraphs are already distinguished by indentation, and there are translator's notes in tiny print, this makes for some ugly pages. The original lecture notes have been published in full in German but not in English. Nisbet indicates in each case which student was responsible and where Gans varied from his source. Some more lecture material is given in Wood's editorial notes. Wood gives 1821 as the date of publication of the *Philosophy of Right*; but Nisbet dates it to 1820. This (unacknowledged) discordance is not, as might be thought, due to a misprint, but reflects a long-standing confusion in Hegel studies whose origins I do not know. Nisbet's translation is often not so smooth as Knox but it is far more exact. Especially useful is the Glossary and the frequent citation of the technical term translated. One defect of Knox's translation was the introduction of a plethora of Latin words and phrases absent from Hegel's German. This time everything is translated into English.

The translator's notes are in the text and the editor's at the end. This works tolerably well; but a collision of translator's and editor's notes to 145A gives the effect of two men trying to get through a door at the same time. Hegel often got his cross references wrong, and Knox patiently corrected them. Nisbet generally follows Knox; but it is very strange that he does not follow him in pointing out that in section 270 the reference to 358 should have been to 359, and again that in section 347 Hegel's 346 should have been 345.

Allen Wood (who recently brought out a commentary on Hegel) provides useful notes to the text and a well-informed, and wonderfully lucid, introduction situating the work; he concludes with a hint at Hegel's continuing critical relevance. In-

deed Hegel's work is a major influence on contemporary 'communitarian' political thought (e.g. Alasdair MacIntyre, Michael Sandel, and Michael Walzer). This is a splendid edition of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*; Wood and Nisbet are to be congratulated.

Chris Arthur

Anthony Kemp, *The Estrangement of the Past: A Study of the Origins of Modern Historical Consciousness*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1991. viii + 228pp., £26 hb, 0 19 506545X.

'All ideologies,' according to Kemp, 'are fundamentally descriptions not of a present state, but of a past history.' With that thought in mind, he examines the historical ideologies formed by Christianity at two vital moments: its emergence as the accepted faith of the late Roman Empire; and its fracture at the time of the Reformation. He contends that there is an affinity between Christianity's ideologies of the past and the Western 'science' of history – to the detriment of the latter.

Kemp's first historiographical moment is the synthesis (by Eusebius, Augustine and Orosius) of revelation with classical history. A 'grammar of absence' haunted the undertaking. Because Christianity is a religion of divine intervention into the historical world, the present moment can only be an emptiness between the last appearance of God and the second coming. Yet, though He is absent from the shifting, secular history of the present, God gives meaning to the world so long as He is conjured up in the immobility of the historical text. This ideology of 'total' or 'continuous' history was dominant throughout the Middle Ages.

But Wycliffe and Luther introduced a second ideology of history, which broke with continuity and repetition. It culminated, in the mid 16th century, with Foxe's

Acts and Monuments. By pursuing the return to the pure moment of faith, this new, 'supersessive' history admits that mutation is inevitable. But it is vulnerable to scepticism so long as no definitive transformation comes about. For reasons which are not very evident, Kemp then analyses 19th-century American writers (Emerson, Thoreau, Arthur Hugh Clough, Henry Adams) as the epitome of these tensions.

According to Kemp, rhetorical structures, derived from these religious ideologies of time, have formed modern historical consciousness. This accommodates the way the past is perpetually superseded only by a transcendent expectation: the definitive culmination of knowledge and the closure of history. Understood in terms of this rhetoric of historical consciousness, Vico's claim for a 'science' of history is merely an incantation to evoke the ineffability of divine truth.

In aiming rhetorical analysis against 'scientific' history, Kemp's critique goes somewhat further than Hayden White's *Metahistory* (1973) and *The Content and the Form* (1987). But Kemp provokes similar doubts about whether an analysis of the rhetoric of texts, no matter how revealing, can establish a broader necessity. His case begins, for example, in the *peculiarity* of the Christian relationship with God. Yet, by the time he reaches the Reformation moment, he is happy to talk not of 'this' history, but of 'history' as such. 'History,' he then tells us, 'is a literary structure whose literariness *must always* be denied.' Or later: 'Only by an assertion that knowledge is essentially complete ... can the supersessive be transmuted into the pattern of progress.' From present and long-standing tensions within Western thinking about history, Kemp (like others) slips into saying that there is never anything more than rhetorical artifice behind ideas of historical change or progress.

Noel Parker

Mark Fisher, *Personal Love*, London, Duckworth, 1990. 118pp., £12.95 hb, 0 7156 2340 0.

Love is the stuff of story, but it is also a philosophical topic with a significant history behind it. Mark Fisher stands in honourable succession to this philosophical tradition. The aims of his book are two-fold: first to define love, and then to describe an ideal of love, from which we depart all too often. The definition begins by a process of elimination but concludes more positively. Love is not a feeling, a sensation, an emotion, or a belief, though all these are involved in love. It is not a state at all, but a process in which two

selves meld to become a *fused self*. This fused self is itself in a process of coming into being, maintaining itself in being, or going out of being. The fusion is possible through *humble benevolence*: 'the desire that the other person obtain what she desires, not for reasons related to my good but simply because it is what she desires ... because they are hers they are mine.'

Ideally, this fusion of two people in erotic love leads to the development of humble benevolence in a mutual relationship of loving and being loved. Unfortunately, there are many occasions in which mutual love does not develop, and neither does the fused self come into being. Poetry and literature are full of examples showing the pitfalls and deformations of love.



Equality is another feature of the best sort of love. The love of parents for their children and *vice versa* seems to go against this view, but not really. The difference between adult love and the others is a change in position of the fused self. In adult love and friendship, we have the coming into being of a fused self out of separateness. With the young child and the parent, however, we start with a fused self but must go our separate ways in time. Nevertheless, Fisher argues that the chance to have an adult friendship with one's own children is one of the great blessings of love.

Fisher concludes with the question of whether love can survive death. His answer is that it cannot. Death destroys the fused self. Nevertheless, the hope that it will not do so helps to explain the attraction in the idea that there is a kind of immortality in one's offspring, that one lives on in them. The illusion is that something of the fused self which included one's own identity literally continues once one of the selves has left the scene. It also explains the sense of loss we feel when someone we love dies. We feel that part of ourselves has died. It is, in fact, the death of the fused self we feel, the 'we' which looks at the world with four eyes and thinks about it with one mind.

The concept of the fused self is the most difficult part of the book to grasp, but I was helped when it was made clear that fusions of selves is always a matter of

degree. There is a spectrum between complete separation and the unrealisable ideal of total fusion. The fused self is an unstable dynamic process, which can come apart. Sexual jealousy and rivalry for friendship can cause the break up of the fused self, bringing an end to love. Fisher's view is that the possibility of jealousy is intrinsic to erotic love; and while we may hope to eliminate it in our friendships, the same is not the case in relationships in which sex is involved.

This short book is well thought-out and clearly written. Whatever we conclude about Fisher's definition and ideal of love, his book gives us a philosophical perspective from which again to question and interpret the literature of love.

Jeffrey A. Mason

Lionel Rose, *The Erosion of Childhood, Child Oppression in Britain 1860-1918*, London, Routledge, 1991. 294pp., £35.00 hb, 0 415 00165 X.

At a time when the events of Cleveland continue to cast a long shadow, and the recent passing of the Children Act has renewed debate about children's rights, it is useful to be reminded of what life was like for children a hundred years ago, especially as this was the period of the first serious recognition of the ill-treatment of children and of the consequent need for their protection. The 1880s witnessed the formation of the NSPCC and the passing of the first great Prevention of Cruelty to Children Act. This book details, with relentless comprehensiveness, a late Victorian child's world at work, home and school. It is not a pretty sight. However, it is also worth being reminded, as one is by Rose, that the improvement of the child's lot probably owed more to expediency than disinterested philanthropy. Concern about a nation's future 'efficiency' motivated much of the reformers' zeal for its children's health and welfare; and it was as much to get them off the streets as into the schools that their education was made compulsory. Rose's narrative is long on factual detail and comparatively short on analysis. One would, for instance, have liked to hear more of the debates about the sanctity of the family, the rights of parents and the State's duties towards its younger citizens. A good flavour of these is supplied in George Behlmer's history of the NSPCC during the same period. Still, Rose's text supplies a depressing and timely reminder of how our society's abuse of children was, until all too recently, tolerated, or simply overlooked.

David Archard